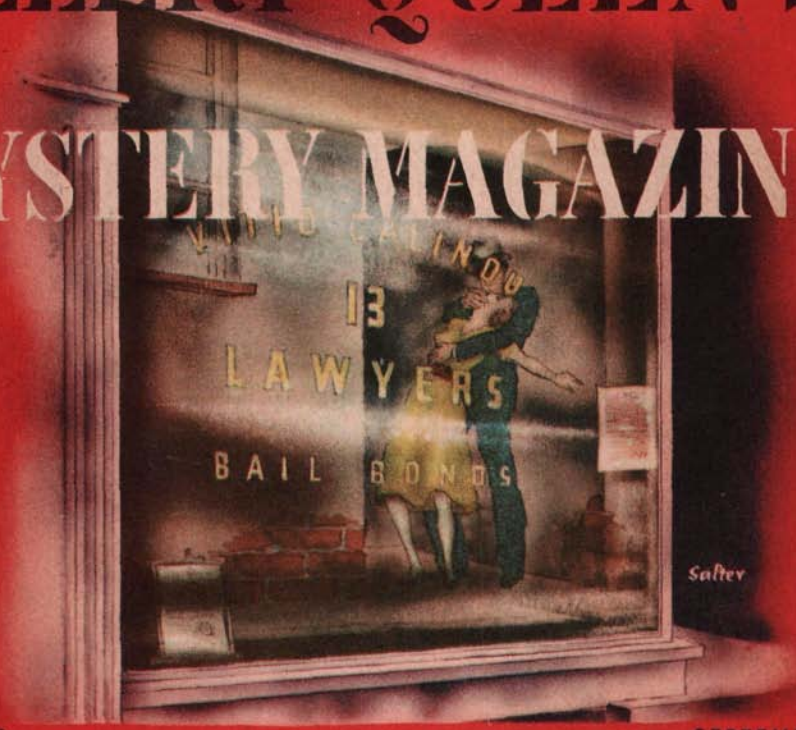
# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

VOL. 6 NO. 24 SEPTEMBER 1945

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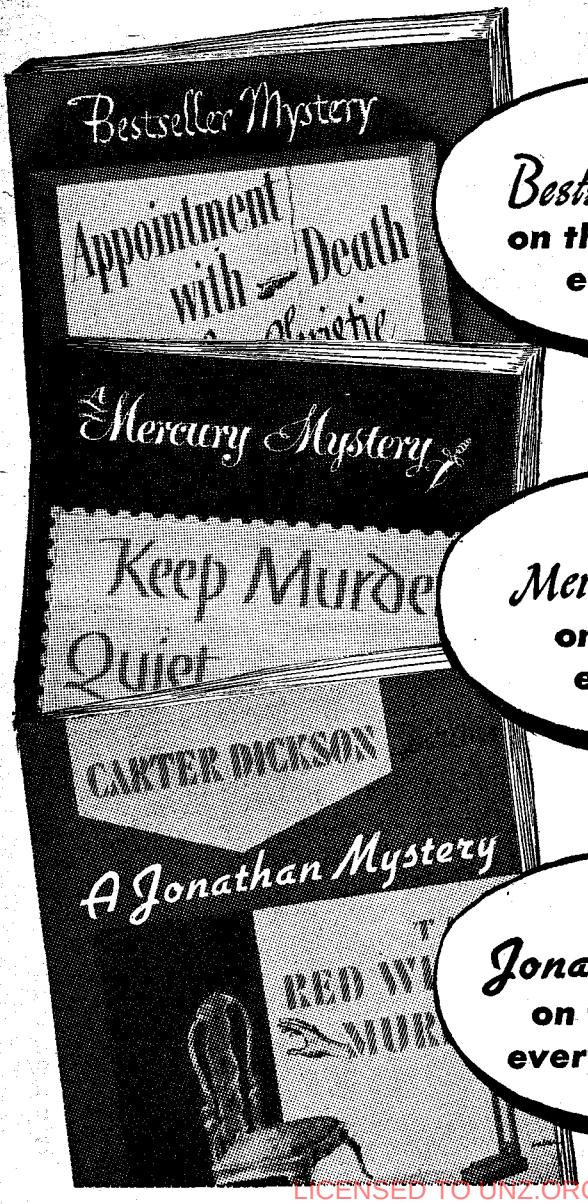


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*six stories available in book form; but such a line-of-least-resistance policy is not in the spirit of EQMM editorship. No, we have always stalked the unknown, and as you must know by this time, we are passionate and indefatigable hunters.*

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# DR. HYDE, DETECTIVE, AND THE WHITE PILLARS MURDER

*by G. K. CHESTERTON*

Those who have discussed the secret of the success of the great detective, Dr. Adrian Hyde, could find no finer example of his remarkable methods than the affair which came to be called "The White Pillars Mystery." But that extraordinary man left no personal notes and we owe our record of it to his two young assistants, John Brandon and Walter Weir. Indeed, as will be seen, it was they who could best describe the first

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investigations in detail, from the outside; and that for a rather remarkable reason.

They were both men of exceptional ability; they had fought bravely and even brilliantly in the Great War; they were cultivated, they were capable, they were trustworthy, and they were starving. For such was the reward which England in the hour of victory accorded to the deliverers of the world. It was a long time before they consented in desperation to consider anything so remote from their instincts as employment in a private detective agency. Jack Brandon, who was a dark, compact, resolute, restless youth, with a boyish appetite for detective tales and talk, regarded the notion with a half-fascinated apprehension, but his friend Weir, who was long and fair and languid, a lover of music and metaphysics, with a candid disgust.

"I believe it might be frightfully interesting," said Brandon. "Haven't you ever had the detective fever when you couldn't help overhearing somebody say something — 'If only he knew what she did to the Archdeacon,' or 'And then the whole business about Susan and the dog will come out?' "

"Yes," replied Weir, "but you only heard snatches because you didn't mean to listen and almost immediately left off listening. If you were a detective, you'd have to crawl under the bed or hide in the dust-bin to hear the whole secret, till your dignity was as dirty as your clothes."

"Isn't it better than stealing?" asked Brandon, gloomily, "which seems to be the next step."

"Why, no; I'm not sure that it is!" answered his friend.

Then, after a pause, he added, reflectively, "Besides, it isn't as if we'd get the sort of work that's relatively decent. We can't claim to know the wretched trade. Clumsy eavesdropping must be worse than the blind spying on the blind. You've not only got to know what is said, but what is meant. There's a lot of difference between listening and hearing. I don't say I'm exactly in a position to fling away a handsome salary offered me by a great criminologist like Dr. Adrian Hyde, but, unfortunately, he isn't likely to offer it."

But Dr. Adrian Hyde was an unusual person in more ways than one, and a better judge of applicants than most modern employers. He was a very tall man with a chin so sunk on his chest as to give him, in spite of his height, almost a look of being hunchbacked; but though the face seemed thus fixed as in a frame, the eyes were as active as a bird's, shifting and darting everywhere and observing everything; his long limbs ended in large hands and feet, the former being almost always thrust into his trouser-pockets, and the latter being loaded with more than appropriately large boots. With all his awkward figure he was not without gaiety and a taste for good things, especially good wine and tobacco; his manner was grimly genial and his insight and personal judgment

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marvellously rapid. Which was how it came about that John Brandon and Walter Weir were established at comfortable desks in the detective's private office, when Mr. Alfred Morse was shown in, bringing with him the problem of White Pillars.

Mr. Alfred Morse was a very stolid and serious person with stiffly-brushed brown hair, a heavy brown face and a heavy black suit of mourning of a cut somewhat provincial, or perhaps colonial. His first words were accompanied with an inoffensive but dubious cough and a glance at the two assistants.

"This is rather confidential business," he said.

"Mr. Morse," said Dr. Hyde, with quiet good humour, "if you were knocked down by a cab and carried to a hospital, your life might be saved by the first surgeon in the land; but you couldn't complain if he let students learn from the operation. These are my two cleverest pupils, and if you want good detectives, you must let them be trained."

"Oh, very well," said the visitor, "perhaps it is not quite so easy to talk of the personal tragedy as if we were alone; but I think I can lay the main facts before you.

"I am the brother of Melchior Morse, whose dreadful death is so generally deplored. I need not tell you about him; he was a public man of more than average public spirit; and I suppose his benefactions and social work are known throughout the world. I had not seen so much of him as I could wish till the last few years; for I have been much abroad; I suppose some would call me the rolling stone of the family, compared with my brother, but I was deeply attached to him, and all the resources of the family estate will be open to anyone ready to avenge his death. You will understand I shall not lightly abandon that duty.

"The crime occurred, as you probably know, at his country place called 'White Pillars,' after its rather unique classical architecture; a colonnade in the shape of a crescent, like that at St. Peter's, runs half-way round an artificial lake, to which the descent is by a flight of curved stone steps. It is in the lake that my brother's body was found floating in the moonlight; but as his neck was broken, apparently with a blow, he had clearly been killed elsewhere. When the butler found the body, the moon was on the other side of the house and threw the inner crescent of the colonnade and steps into profound shadow. But the butler swears he saw the figure of the fleeing man in dark outline against the moonlight as it turned the corner of the house. He says it was a striking outline, and he would know it again."

"Those outlines are very vivid sometimes," said the detective, thoughtfully, "but of course very difficult to prove. Were there any other traces? Any footprints or fingerprints?"

"There were no fingerprints," said Morse, gravely, "and the murderer must have meant to take equal care to leave no footprints. That is why the

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crime was probably committed on the great flight of stone steps. But they say the cleverest murderer forgets something; and when he threw the body in the lake there must have been a splash, which was not quite dry when it was discovered; and it showed the edge of a pretty clear footprint. I have a copy of the thing here, the original is at home." He passed a brown slip across to Hyde, who looked at it and nodded. "The only other thing on the stone steps that might be a clue was a cigar-stump. My brother did not smoke."

"Well, we will look into those clues more closely in due course," said Dr. Hyde. "Now tell me something about the house and the people in it."

Mr. Morse shrugged his shoulders, as if the family in question did not impress him.

"There were not many people in it," he replied, "putting aside a fairly large staff of servants, headed by the butler, Barton, who has been devoted to my brother for years. The servants all bear a good character; but of course you will consider all that. The other occupants of the house at the time were my brother's wife, a rather silent elderly woman, devoted almost entirely to religion and good works; a niece, of whose prolonged visits the old lady did not perhaps altogether approve, for Miss Barbara Butler is half Irish and rather flighty and excitable; my brother's secretary, Mr. Graves, a very silent young man (I confess I could never make out whether he was shy or sly), and my brother's solicitor, Mr. Caxton, who is an ordinary snuffy lawyer, and happened to be down there on legal business. They might all be guilty in theory, I suppose, but I'm a practical man and I don't imagine such things in practice."

"Yes, I realized you were a practical man when you first came in," said Dr. Hyde, rather dryly. "I realized a few other details as well. Is that all you have to tell me?"

"Yes," replied Morse, "I hope I have made myself clear."

"It is well not to forget anything," went on Adrian Hyde, gazing at him calmly. "It is still better not to suppress anything, when confiding in a professional man. You may have heard, perhaps, of a knack I have of noticing things about people. I knew some of the things you told me before you opened your mouth; as that you long lived abroad and had just come up from the country. And it was easy to infer from your own words that you are the heir of your brother's considerable fortune."

"Well, yes, I am," replied Alfred Morse, stolidly.

"When you said you were a rolling stone," went on Adrian Hyde, with the same placid politeness, "I fear some might say you were a stone which the builders were justified in rejecting. Your adventures abroad have not all been happy. I perceive that you deserted from some foreign navy, and that you were once in prison for robbing a bank. If it comes to an inquiry into your brother's

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death and your present inheritance ——"

"Are you trying to suggest," cried the other fiercely, "that appearances are against me?"

"My dear sir," said Dr. Adrian Hyde blandly, "appearances are most damnably against you. But I don't always go by appearances. It all depends. Good-day."

When the visitor had withdrawn, looking rather black, the impetuous Brandon broke out into admiration of the Master's methods and besieged him with questions.

"Look here," said the great man, good-humouredly, "you've no business to be asking how I guessed right. You ought to be guessing at the guesses yourselves. Think it out."

"The desertion from a foreign navy," said Weir, slowly, "might be something to do with those bluish marks on his wrist. Perhaps they were some special tattooing and he'd tried to rub them out."

"That's better," said Dr. Hyde, "you're getting on."

"I know!" cried Brandon, more excitedly, "I know about the prison! They always say, if you once shave your moustache it never grows the same; perhaps there's something like that about hair that's been cropped in gaol. Yes, I thought so. The only thing I can't imagine, is why you should guess he had robbed a bank."

"Well, you think that out too," said Adrian Hyde, "I think you'll find it's the key to the whole of this riddle. And now I'm going to leave this case to you. I'm going to have a half-holiday." As a signal that his own working hours were over, he lit a large and sumptuous cigar, and began pishing and poohing over the newspapers.

"Lord, what rubbish!" he cried. "My God, what headlines! Look at this about White Pillars: 'Whose Was the Hand?' They've murdered even murder with clichés like clubs of wood. Look here, you two fellows had better go down to White Pillars and try to put some sense into them. I'll come down later and clear up the mess."

The two young detectives had originally intended to hire a car, but by the end of their journey they were very glad they had decided to travel by train with the common herd. Even as they were in the act of leaving the train, they had a stroke of luck in the matter of that collecting of stray words and whispers which Weir found the least congenial, but Brandon desperately clung to as the most practicable, of all forms of detective inquiry. The steady scream of a steam-whistle, which was covering all the shouted conversation, stopped suddenly in the fashion that makes a shout shrivel into a whisper. But there was one whisper caught in the silence and sounding clear as a bell; a voice that said, "There were excellent reasons for killing him. I know them, if nobody else does."

Brandon managed to trace the voice to its origin; a sallow face with a long shaven chin and a rather scornful lower lip. He saw the same face more

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than once on the remainder of his journey, passing the ticket collector, appearing in a car behind them on the road, haunting him so significantly, that he was not surprised to meet the man eventually in the garden of White Pillars, and to have him presented as Mr. Caxton, the solicitor.

"That man evidently knows more than he's told the authorities," said Brandon to his friend, "but I can't get anything more out of him."

"My dear fellow," cried Weir, "that's just what they're all like. Don't you feel by this time that it's the atmosphere of the whole place? It's not a bit like those delightful detective stories. In a detective story all the people in the house are gaping imbeciles, who can't understand anything, and in the midst stands the brilliant sleuth who understands everything. Here am I standing in the midst, a brilliant sleuth, and I believe, on my soul, I'm the only person in the house who doesn't know all about the crime."

"There's one other anyhow," said Brandon, with gloom, "two brilliant sleuths."

"Everybody else knows except the detective," went on Weir, "everybody knows something, anyhow, if it isn't everything. There's something odd even about old Mrs. Morse; she's devoted to charity, yet she doesn't seem to have agreed with her husband's philanthropy. It's as if they'd quarrelled about it. Then there's the secretary, the quiet, good-looking young man, with a square face like Napoleon. He looks as if he would get what he wants, and I've very little doubt that what he wants is that red-haired Irish girl they call Barbara. I think she wants the same thing; but if so there's really no reason for them to hide it. And they are hiding it, or hiding something. Even the butler is secretive. They can't all have been in a conspiracy to kill the old man."

"Anyhow, it all comes back to what I said first," observed Brandon. "If they're in a conspiracy, we can only hope to overhear their talk. It's the only way."

"It's an excessively beastly way," said Weir, calmly, "and we will proceed to follow it."

They were walking slowly round the great semicircle of colonnade that looked inwards upon the lake, that shone like a silver mirror to the moon. It was of the same stretch of clear moonlit nights as that recent one, on which old Morse had died mysteriously in the same spot. They could imagine him as he was in many portraits, a little figure in a skull cap with a white beard thrust forward, standing on those steps, till a dreadful figure that had no face in their dreams descended the stairway and struck him down. They were standing at one end of the colonnade, full of these visions, when Brandon said suddenly:

"Did you speak?"

"I? No," replied his friend staring.

"Somebody spoke," said Brandon, in a low voice, "yet we seem to be quite alone."

Then their blood ran cold for an

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instant. For the wall behind them spoke; and it seemed to say quite plainly, in a rather harsh voice:

"Do you remember exactly what you said?"

Weir stared at the wall for an instant; then he slapped it with his hand with a shaky laugh.

"My God," he cried, "what a miracle! And what a satire! We've sold ourselves to the devil as a couple of damned eavesdroppers; and he's put us in the very chamber of eavesdropping — into the ear of Dionysius, the Tyrant. Don't you see this is a whispering gallery, and people at the other end of it are whispering?"

"No, they're talking too loud to hear us, I think," whispered Brandon, "but we'd better lower our voices. It's Caxton the lawyer, and the young secretary."

The secretary's unmistakable and vigorous voice sounded along the wall saying:

"I told him I was sick of the whole business; and if I'd known he was such a tyrant, I'd never have had to do with him. I think I told him he ought to be shot. I was sorry enough for it afterwards."

Then they heard the lawyer's more croaking tones saying, "Oh, you said that, did you? Well, there seems no more to be said now. We had better go in," which was followed by echoing feet and then silence.

The next day Weir attached himself to the lawyer with a peculiar pertinacity and made a new effort to get something more out of that oyster. He was pondering deeply on the very little that he had got, when Brandon rushed up to him with hardly-restrained excitement.

"I've been at that place again," he cried, "I suppose you'll say I've sunk lower in the pit of slime, and perhaps I have, but it's got to be done. I've been listening to the young people this time, and I believe I begin to see something; though heaven knows, it's not what I want to see. The secretary and the girl are in love all right, or have been; and when love is loose pretty dreadful things can happen. They were talking about getting married, of course, at least she was, and what do you think she said? 'He made an excuse of my being under age.' So it's pretty clear the old man opposed the match. No doubt that was what the secretary meant by talking about his tyranny."

"And what did the secretary say when the girl said that?"

"That's the queer thing," answered Brandon, "rather an ugly thing, I begin to fancy. The young man only answered, rather sulkily, I thought: 'Well, he was within his rights there; and perhaps it was for the best.' She broke out in protest: 'How can you say such a thing'; and certainly it was a strange thing for a lover to say."

"What are you driving at?" asked his friend.

"Do you know anything about women?" asked Brandon. "Suppose the old man was not only trying to break off the engagement but *succeeding* in breaking it off. Suppose the

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young man was weakening and beginning to wonder whether she was worth losing his job for. The woman might have waited any time or eloped any time. But if she thought she was in danger of losing him altogether, don't you think she might have turned on the tempter with the fury of despair? I fear we have got a glimpse of a very heartrending tragedy. Don't you believe it, too?"

Walter Weir unfolded his long limbs and got slowly to his feet, filling a pipe and looking at his friend with a sort of quizzical melancholy.

"No, I don't believe it," he said, "but that's because I'm such an unbeliever. You see, I don't believe in all this eavesdropping business; I don't think we shine at it. Or, rather, I think you shine too much at it and dazzle yourself blind. I don't believe in all this detective romance about deducing everything from a trifle. I don't believe in your little glimpse of a great tragedy. It would be a great tragedy no doubt, and does you credit as literature or a symbol of life; you can build imaginative things of that sort on a trifle. You can build everything on the trifle except the truth. But in the present practical issue, I don't believe there's a word of truth in it. I don't believe the old man was opposed to the engagement; I don't believe the young man was backing out of it; I believe the young people are perfectly happy and ready to be married tomorrow. I don't believe anybody in this house had any motive to kill Morse or has any notion of how he was killed. In spite of what I said, the poor shabby old sleuth enjoys his own again. I believe I am the only person who knows the truth; and it only came to me in a flash a few minutes ago."

"Why, how do you mean?" asked the other.

"It came to me in a final flash," said Weir, "when you repeated those words of the girl: 'He made the excuse that I was under age.' "

After a few puffs of his pipe, he resumed reflectively: "One queer thing is, that the error of the eavesdropper often comes from a thing being too clear. We're so sure that people mean what we mean, that we can't believe they mean what they say. Didn't I once tell you that it's one thing to listen and another to hear? And sometimes the voice talks too plain. For instance, when young Graves, the secretary, said that he was sick of the business, he meant it literally, and not metaphorically. He meant he was sick of Morse's trade, because it was tyrannical."

"Morse's trade? What trade?" asked Brandon, staring.

"Our saintly old philanthropist was a moneylender," replied Weir, "and as great a rascal as his rascally brother. That is the great central fact that explains everything. That is what the girl meant by talking about being under age. She wasn't talking about her love-affair at all, but about some small loan she'd tried to get from the old man and which he refused because she was a minor. Her fiancé made the

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very sensible comment that perhaps it was all for the best; meaning that she had escaped the net of a usurer. And her momentary protest was only a spirited young lady's lawful privilege of insisting on her lover agreeing with all the silly things she says. That is an example of the error of the eavesdropper, or the fallacy of detection by trifles. But, as I say, it's the money-lending business that's the clue to everything in this house. That's what all of them, even the secretary and solicitor, out of a sort of family pride, are trying to hush up and hide from detectives and newspapers. But the old man's murder was much more likely to get it into the newspapers. They had no motive to murder him, and they didn't murder him."

"Then who did?" demanded Brandon.

"Ah," replied his friend, but with less than his usual languor in the ejaculation and something a little like a hissing intake of the breath. He had seated himself once more, with his elbows on his knees, but the other was surprised to realize something rigid about his new attitude; almost like a creature crouching for a spring. He still spoke quite dryly, however, and merely said:

"In order to answer that, I fancy we must go back to the first talk that we overheard, before we came to the house; the very first of all."

"Oh, I see," said Brandon, a light dawning on his face. "You mean what we heard the solicitor say in the train."

"No," replied Weir, in the same motionless manner, "that was only another illustration touching the secret trade. Of course his solicitor knew he was a moneylender; and knew that any such moneylender has a crowd of victims, who might kill him. It's quite true he was killed by one of those victims. But it wasn't the lawyer's remark in the train that I was talking about, for a very simple reason."

"And why not?" inquired his companion.

"Because that was not the first conversation we overheard."

Walter Weir clutched his knees with his long bony hands, and seemed to stiffen still more as if in a trance, but he went on talking steadily.

"I have told you the moral and the burden of all these things; that it is one thing to hear what men say and another to hear what they mean. And it was at the very first talk that we heard all the words and missed all the meaning. We did not overhear that first talk slinking about in moonlit gardens and whispering galleries. We overheard that first talk sitting openly at our regular desks in broad daylight, in a bright and businesslike office. But we no more made sense of that talk than if it had been half a whisper, heard in a black forest or a cave."

He sprang to his feet as if a stiff spring were released and began striding up and down, with what was for him an unnatural animation.

"That was the talk we really misunderstood," he cried. "That was the conversation that we heard word for

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word, and yet missed entirely! Fools that we were! Deaf and dumb and imbecile, sitting there like dummies and being stuffed with a stage play! We were actually allowed to be eavesdroppers, tolerated, ticketed, given special permits to be eavesdroppers; and still we could not eavesdrop! I never even guessed till ten minutes ago the meaning of that conversation in the office. That terrible conversation! That terrible meaning! Hate and hateful fear and shameless wickedness and mortal peril — death and hell wrestled naked before our eyes in that office, and we never saw them. A man accused another man of murder across a table, and we never heard it."

"Oh," gasped Brandon at last, "you mean that the Master accused the brother of murder?"

"No!" retorted Weir, in a voice like a volley, "I mean that the brother accused the Master of murder."

"The Master!"

"Yes," answered Weir, and his high voice fell suddenly, "and the accusation was true. The man who murdered old Morse was our employer, Dr. Adrian Hyde."

"What can it all mean?" asked Brandon, and thrust his hand through his thick brown hair.

"That was our mistake at the beginning," went on the other calmly, "that we did not think what it could all mean. Why was the brother so careful to say the reproduction of the footprint was a proof and not the original? Why did Dr. Hyde say the outline of the fugitive would be difficult to prove? Why did he tell us, with that sardonic grin, that the brother having robbed a bank was the key of the riddle? Because the whole of that consultation of the client and the specialist was a fiction for our benefit. The whole course of events was determined by that first thing that happened; that the young and innocent detectives were allowed to remain in the room. Didn't you think yourself the interview was a little too like that at the beginning of every damned detective story? Go over it speech by speech, and you will see that every speech was a thrust or parry under a cloak. That blackmailing blackguard Alfred hunted out Doctor Hyde simply to accuse and squeeze him. Seeing us there, he said, 'This is confidential,' meaning, 'You don't want to be accused before them.' Dr. Hyde answered, 'They're my favourite pupils,' meaning, 'I'm less likely to be blackmailed before them; they shall stay.' Alfred answered, 'Well, I can state my business, if not quite so personally,' meaning, 'I can accuse you so that you understand, if they don't.' And he did. He presented his proofs like pistols across the table; things that sounded rather thin, but, in Hyde's case, happened to be pretty thick. His boots, for instance, happened to be very thick. His huge footprint would be unique enough to be a clue. So would the cigar-end; for very few people can afford to smoke his cigars. Of course, that's what got him tangled up with the money-lender — extravagance. You see how much

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money you get through if you smoke those cigars all day and never drink anything but the best post-war champagne. And though a black silhouette against the moon sounds as vague as moonshine, Hyde's huge figure and hunched shoulders would be rather marked. Well, you know how the blackmailed man hit back: 'I perceive by your left eyebrow that you are a deserter; I deduce from the pimple on your nose that you were once in gaol,' meaning, 'I know you, and you're as much a crook as I am; expose me and I'll expose you.' Then he said he had deduced in the Sherlock Holmes manner that Alfred had robbed a bank, and that was where he went too far. He presumed on the incredible credulity, which is the mark of the modern mind when anyone has uttered the magic word 'science.' He presumed on the priestcraft of our time; but he presumed the least little bit too much, so far as I was concerned. It was then I first began to doubt. A man might possibly deduce by scientific detection that another man had been in a certain navy or prison, but by no possibility could he deduce from a man's appearance that what he had once robbed was a bank. It was simply impossible. Dr. Hyde knew it was his biggest bluff; that was why he told you in mockery, that it was the key to the riddle. It was; and I managed to get hold of the key."

He chuckled in a hollow fashion as he laid down his pipe. "That jibe at his own bluff was like him; he really is a remarkable man or a remarkable devil. He has a sort of horrible sense of humour. Do you know, I've got a notion that sounds rather a nightmare, about what happened on that great slope of steps that night. I believe Hyde jeered at the journalistic catchword, 'Whose Was the Hand?' partly because he, himself, had managed it without hands. I believe he managed to commit a murder entirely with his feet. I believe he tripped up the poor old usurer and stamped on him on the stone steps with those monstrous boots. An idyllic moonlight scene, isn't it? But there's something that seems to make it worse. I think he had the habit anyhow, partly to avoid leaving his fingerprints, which may be known to the police. Anyhow, I believe he did the whole murder with his hands in his trouser-pockets."

Brandon shuddered suddenly; then collected himself and said, rather weakly:

"Then you don't think the science of observation ——"

"Science of observation be damned!" cried Weir. "Do you still think private detectives get to know about criminals by smelling their hair-oil, or counting their buttons? They do it, a whole gang of them do it just as Hyde did. They get to know about criminals by being half criminals themselves, by being of the same rotten world, by belonging to it and by betraying it, by setting a thief to catch a thief, and proving there is no honour among thieves. I don't say there are no honest private detectives, but if there are,

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you don't get into their service as easily as you and I got into the office of the distinguished Dr. Adrian Hyde. You ask what all this means, and I tell you one thing it means. It means that you and I are going to sweep crossings or scrub out drains. I feel as if I should like a clean job."

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*In "The White Pillars Murder" Mr. Chesterton made use of a rare (possibly unique) type of detective-story clue — a clue so daring in conception and execution as to take one's breath away. No doubt you spotted it — but in case you didn't, it is worth a few more paragraphs of your time to have it called to your attention.*

*What was the very first fact given to you in this story? The name of the detective — Dr. Hyde. It was handed to you openly, brazenly, bold-spiritedly, in the very title of the story. What is suggested by this specific character-name? What connotation is inextricably tied to the name "Dr. Hyde"? Don't you see? It could have stemmed, consciously or unconsciously, from only one literary source — the two names of the chief character in Robert Louis Stevenson's* STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE. *"Dr. Hyde" is a combination of "Dr. Jekyll" and "Mr. Hyde" — the vocational title of the former plus the surname of the latter.*

*Now, what kind of person was Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde? A man of double life as well as double name — a man of double symbolism, outwardly good, secretly evil. Isn't that precisely the character of Dr. Hyde, Detective?*

*Mr. Chesterton had the unmitigated audacity to make the very name of his principal character the all-revealing clue! By including the name in the title of the story, Mr. Chesterton challenged your wits from the outset. If you had grasped the true significance of the name "Dr. Hyde," if you had realized from the beginning that the detective was "suspect" — a man of double life, outwardly good, secretly evil — you would have immediately seen through the magnificent paradox of that opening scene of the case in which supposedly a "client" was calling on a "detective" and presenting the "facts" in a "murder mystery." What other author would have dared to fling in your face, again and again and again, so simple and yet so subtle a clue? — and get away with it!*

"Q"

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*It is a genuine pleasure to bring you another story by James M. Cain, one of your Editor's favorite "tough" writers. Mr. Cain titled this story "Pastorale." According to the dictionary, "pastorale" is a lyric cantata of idyllic simplicity and sentiment. Mark those words well, for it is plainly your Editor's duty to warn you: any resemblance between Mr. Cain's story and the true meaning of "pastorale" is purely* CAINcidental!

# PASTORALE

*by JAMES M. CAIN*

WELL, it looks like Burbie was going to get hung. And if he does, what he can lay it on is, he always figured he was so dam smart.

You see, Burbie, he left town when he was about sixteen year old. He run away with one of them travelling shows, "East Lynne" I think it was, and he stayed away about ten year. And when he come back he thought he knowed a lot. Burbie, he's got them watery blue eyes what kind of stick out from his face, and how he killed the time was to sit around and listen to the boys talk down at the poolroom or over at the barber-shop or a couple other places where he hung out, and then wink at you like they was all making a fool of theirself or something and nobody didn't know it but him.

But when you come right down to what Burbie had in his head, why it wasn't much. 'Course, he generally always had a job, painting around or maybe helping out on a new house, like of that, but what he liked to do was to play baseball with the high-school team. And they had a big fight over it, 'cause Burbie was so old nobody wouldn't believe he went to the school, and them other teams was all the time putting up a squawk. So then he couldn't play no more. And another thing he liked to do was sing at the entertainments. I reckon he liked that most of all. 'Cause he claimed that a whole lot of the time while he was away he was on the stage, and I reckon maybe he was at that, 'cause he was pretty good, specially when he dressed hisself up like a old-time Rube and come out and spoke a piece what he knowed.

Well, when he come back to town he seen Lida and it was a natural. 'Cause Lida, she was just about the same kind of a thing for a woman as Burbie was for a man. She used to work in the store, selling drygoods to the women, and kind of making hats on the side. 'Cepting only she didn't stay on the drygoods side no more'n she had to. She was generally over where the boys was drinking Coca Cola, and all the time carrying on



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about did they like it with ammonia or lemon, and could she have a swallow outen their glass. And what she had her mind on was the clothes she had on, and was she dated up for Sunday night. Them clothes was pretty snappy, and she made them herself. And I heared some of them say she wasn't hard to date up, and after you done kept your date why maybe you wasn't going to be disappointed. And why Lida married the old man I don't know, lessen she got tired working at the store and tooken a look at the big farm where he lived at, about two mile from town.

By the time Burbie got back she'd been married about a year and she was about due. So her and him commence meeting each other, out in the orchard back of the old man's house. The old man would go to bed right after supper and then she'd sneak out and meet Burbie. And nobody wasn't supposed to know nothing about it. Only everybody did, 'cause Burbie, after he'd get back to town about eleven o'clock at night, he'd kind of slide into the poolroom and set down easy like. And then somebody'd say, "Yay, Burbie, where you been?" And Burbie, he'd kind of look around, and then he'd pick out somebody and wink at him, and that was how Burbie give it some good advertising.

So the way Burbie tells it, and he tells it plenty since he done got religion down to the jailhouse, it wasn't long before him and Lida thought it would be a good idea to kill the old man. They figured he didn't have long to live nohow, so he might as well go now as wait a couple of years. And another thing, the old man had kind of got hep that something was going on, and they figured if he throwed Lida out it wouldn't be no easy job to get his money even if he died regular. And another thing, by that time the Klux was kind of talking around, so Burbie figured it would be better if him and Lida was to get married, else maybe he'd have to leave town again.

So that was how come he got Hutch in it. You see, he was afeared to kill the old man hisself and he wanted some help. And then he figured it would be pretty good if Lida wasn't nowheres around and it would look like robbery. If it would of been me, I would of left Hutch out of it. 'Cause Hutch, he was mean. He'd been away for a while too, but him going away, that wasn't the same as Burbie going away. Hutch was sent. He was sent for ripping a mail-sack while he was driving the mail-wagon up from the station, and before he come back he done two year down to Atlanta.

But what I mean, he wasn't only crooked, he was mean. He had a ugly look to him, like when he'd order hisself a couple of fried eggs over to the restaurant, and then set and eat them with his head humped down low and his arm curled around his plate like he thought somebody was going to steal it off him, and handle his knife with his thumb down near the tip, kind of like a nigger does a razor. Nobody didn't have much to say to Hutch, and I reckon that's why he ain't

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heared nothing about Burbie and Lida, and et it all up what Burbie told him about the old man having a pot of money hid in the fireplace in the back room.

So one night early in March, Burbie and Hutch went out and done the job. Burbie, he'd already got Lida out of the way. She'd let on she had to go to the city to buy some things, and she went away on No. 6, so everybody knowed she was gone. Hutch, he seen her go, and come running to Burbie saying now was a good time, which was just what Burbie wanted. 'Cause her and Burbie had already put the money in the pot, so Hutch wouldn't think it was no put-up job. Well, anyway they put twenty-three dollars in the pot, all changed into pennies and nickels and dimes so it would look like a big pile, and that was all the money Burbie had. It was kind of like you might say the savings of a lifetime.

And then Burbie and Hutch got in the horse and wagon what Hutch had, 'cause Hutch was in the hauling business again, and they went out to the old man's place. Only they went around the back way, and tied the horse back of the house so nobody couldn't see it from the road, and knocked on the back door and made out like they was just coming through the place on their way back to town and had stopped by to get warmed up, 'cause it was cold as hell. So the old man let them in and give them a drink of some hard cider what he had, and they got canned up a little more. They was already pretty canned, 'cause they both of them had a pint of corn on their hip for to give them some nerve.

And then Hutch he got back of the old man and crowned him with a wrench what he had hid in his coat.

Well, next off Hutch gets sore as hell at Burbie 'cause there ain't no more'n twenty-three dollars in the pot. He didn't say nothing. He just set there, first looking at the money, what he had piled up on the table, and then looking at Burbie.

And then Burbie commences soft-soaping him. He says hope my die he thought there was a thousand dollars anyways in the pot, on account the old man being rich like he was. And he says hope my die it sure was a big surprise to him how little there was there. And he says hope my die it sure does make him feel bad, on account he's the one had the idea first. And he says hope my die it's all his fault and he's going to let Hutch keep all the money, dam if he ain't. He ain't going to take none of it for hisself at all, on account of how bad he feels. And Hutch, he don't say nothing at all, only look at Burbie and look at the money.

And right in the middle of while Burbie was talking, they heared a whole lot of hollering out in front of the house and somebody blowing a automobile horn. And Hutch jumps up and scoops the money and the wrench off the table in his pockets, and hides the pot back in the fireplace. And then he grabs the old man

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and him and Burbie carries him out the back door, hists him in the wagon, and drives off. And how they was able to drive off without them people seeing them was because they come in the back way and that was the way they went. And them people in the automobile, they was a bunch of old folks from the Methodist Church what knowed Lida was away and didn't think so much of Lida nohow and come out to say hello. And when they come in and didn't see nothing, they figured maybe the old man had went in to town and so they went back.

Well, Hutch and Burbie was in a hell of a fix all right. 'Cause there they was, driving along somewheres with the old man in the wagon and they didn't have no more idea than a bald-headed coot where they was going or what they was going to do with him. So Burbie, he commence to whimper. But Hutch kept a-setting there, driving the horse, and he don't say nothing.

So pretty soon they come to a place where they was building a piece of county road, and it was all tore up and a whole lot of tool-boxes laying out on the side. So Hutch gets out and twists the lock off one of them with the wrench, and takes out a pick and a shovel and throws them in the wagon. And then he got in again and drove on for a while till he come to the Whooping Nannie woods, what some of them says has got a ghost in it on dark nights, and it's about three mile from the old man's farm. And Hutch turns in there and pretty soon he come to a kind of a clear place and he stopped. And then, first thing he's said to Burbie, he says,

"Dig that grave!"

So Burbie dug the grave. He dug for two hours, until he got so dam tired he couldn't hardly stand up. But he ain't hardly made no hole at all. 'Cause the ground is froze and even with the pick he couldn't hardly make a dent in it scarcely. But anyhow Hutch stopped him and they throwed the old man in and covered him up. But after they got him covered up his head was sticking out. So Hutch beat the head down good as he could and piled the dirt up around it and they got in and drove off.

After they'd went a little ways, Hutch commence to cuss Burbie. Then he said Burbie'd been lying to him. But Burbie, he swears he ain't been lying. And then Hutch says he *was* lying and with that he hit Burbie. And after he knocked Burbie down in the bottom of the wagon he kicked him and then pretty soon Burbie up and told him about Lida. And when Burbie got done telling him about Lida, Hutch turned the horse around. Burbie asked them what they was going back for and Hutch says they're going back for to git a present for Lida. So they come back to the grave and Hutch made Burbie cut off the old man's head with the shovel. It made Burbie pretty sick, but Hutch made him stick at it, and after a while Burbie had it off. So Hutch throwed it in the wagon and they get in and start back to town once more.

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Well, they wasn't no more'n out of the woods before Hutch takes hisself a slug of corn and commence to holler. He kind of raved to hisself, all about how he was going to make Burbie put the head in a box and tie it up with a string and take it out to Lida for a present, so she'd get a nice surprise when she opened it. Soon as Lida comes back he says Burbie has got to do it, and then he's going to kill Burbie. "I'll kill you!" he says, "I'll kill you, dam you! I'll kill you!" And he says it kind of sing-songy, over and over again.

And then he takes hisself another slug of corn and stands up and whoops. Then he beat on the horse with the whip and the horse commence to run. What I mean, he commence to gallup. And then Hutch hit him some more. And then he commence to screech as loud as he could. "Ride him, cowboy!" he hollers, "Going East! Here come old broadcuff down the road! Whe-e-e-e-e!" And sure enough, here they come down the road, the horse a-running hell to split, and Hutch a-hollering, and Burbie a-shivering, and the head a-rolling around in the bottom of the wagon, and bouncing up in the air when they hit a bump, and Burbie dam near dying every time it hit his feet.

After a while the horse got tired so it wouldn't run no more, and they had to let him walk, and Hutch set down and commence to grunt. So Burbie, he tries to figure out what the hell he's going to do with the head. And pretty soon he remembers a creek what they got to cross, what they ain't crossed on the way out 'cause they come the back way. So he figures he'll throw the head overboard when Hutch ain't looking. So he done it. They come to the creek, and on the way down to the bridge there's a little hill, and when the wagon tilted going down the hill the head rolled up between Burbie's feet, and he held it there, and when they got in the middle of the bridge he reached down and heaved it overboard.

Next off, Hutch give a yell and drop down in the bottom of the wagon. 'Cause what it sounded like was a pistol shot. You see, Burbie done forgot that it was a cold night and the creek done froze over. Not much, just a thin skim about a inch thick, but enough that when that head hit it it cracked pretty loud in different directions. And that was what scared Hutch. So when he got up and seen that head setting out there on the ice in the moonlight, and got it straight what Burbie done, he let on he was going to kill Burbie right there. And he reached for the pick. And Burbie jumped out and run, and he didn't never stop till he got home to the place where he lived at, and locked the door, and climbed in bed and pulled the covers over his head.

Well, the next morning a fellow come running into town and says there's hell to pay down at the bridge. So we all went down there and first thing we seen was that head laying out there on the ice, kind of rolled over on

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one ear. And next thing we seen was Hutch's horse and wagon tied to the bridge rail, and the horse dam near froze to death. And the next thing we seen was the hole in the ice where Hutch fell through. And the next thing we seen, down on the bottom next to one of them bridge pilings, was Hutch.

So the first thing we went to work and done was to get the head. And believe me, a head laying out on thin ice is a pretty dam hard thing to get, and what we had to do was to lasso it. And the next thing we done was to get Hutch. And after we fished him out he had the wrench and the twenty-three dollars in his pockets and the pint of corn on his hip and he was stiff as a board. And near as I can figure out, what happened to him was that after Burbie run away he climbed down on the bridge piling and tried to reach the head and fell in.

But we didn't know nothing about it then, and after we done got the head and the old man was gone and a couple of boys that afternoon found the body and not no head on it, and the pot was found, and them old people from the Methodist Church done told their story and one thing another, we figured out that Hutch done it, specially on account he must of been drunk and he done time in the pen and all like of that, and nobody ain't thought nothing about Burbie. They had the funeral and Lida cried like hell and everybody tried to figure out what Hutch wanted with the head and things went along thataway for three weeks.

Then one night down to the poolroom they was having it some more about the head, and one says one thing and one says another, and Benny Heath, what's a kind of a constable around town, he started a long bum argument about how Hutch must of figured if they couldn't find the head to the body they couldn't prove no murder. So right in the middle of it Burbie kind of looked around like he always done and then he winked. And Benny Heath, he kept on a-talking, and after he got done Burbie kind of leaned over and commence to talk to him. And in a couple of minutes you couldn't of heard a man catch his breath in that place, accounten they was all listening at Burbie.

I already told you Burbie was pretty good when it come to giving a spiel at a entertainment. Well, this here was a kind of a spiel too. Burbie act like he had it all learned by heart. His voice trimmled and ever couple of minutes he'd kind of cry and wipe his eyes and make out like he can't say no more, and then he'd go on.

And the big idea was what a whole lot of hell he done raised in his life. Burbie said it was drink and women what done ruined him. He told about all the women what he knowed, and all the saloons he's been in, and some of it was a lie 'cause if all the saloons was as swell as he said they was they'd of throwed him out. And then he told about how sorry he was about the life he done led, and how hope my die he come home to his old home town just to cut out the devilment and settle

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down. And he told about Lida, and how she wouldn't let him cut it out. And then he told how she done led him on till he got the idea to kill the old man. And then he told about how him and Hutch done it, and all about the money and the head and all the rest of it.

And what it sounded like was a piece what he knowed called "The Face on the Floor," what was about a bum what drawed a picture on the barroom floor of the woman what done ruined him. Only the funny part was that Burbie wasn't ashamed of hisself like he made out he was. You could see he was proud of hisself. He was proud of all them women and all the liquor he'd drunk and he was proud about Lida and he was proud about the old man and the head and being slick enough not to fall in the creek with Hutch. And after he got done he give a yelp and flopped down on the floor and I reckon maybe he thought he was going to die on the spot like the bum what drawed the face on the barroom floor, only he didn't. He kind of lain there a couple of minutes till Benny got him up and put him in the car and tooken him off to jail.

So that's where he's at now, and he's went to work and got religion down there, and all the people what comes to see him, why he sings hymns to them and then he speaks them his piece. And I hear tell he knows it pretty good by now and has got the crying down pat. And Lida, they got her down there too, only she won't say nothing 'cepting she done it same as Hutch and Burbie. So Burbie, he's going to get hung, sure as hell. And if he hadn't felt so smart, he would of been a free man yet.

Only I reckon he done been holding it all so long he just had to spill it.

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*Roughly speaking, there are 1000 different books of detective-crime short stories. These 1000 volumes are divided, like ancient Gaul, into three parts. About one-third are mixed and general collections in which some of, most of, or all the stories in each book concern crime and detection, but not about the same central character. About one-half of the 1000 volumes contain stories wholly unrelated in plot but all revolving, within each book, around the same protagonist — like Reggie Fortune, Arsène Lupin, Craig Kennedy, and Dr. Thorndyke. The remaining volumes — approximately one-sixth of the total 1000 — consist of the smaller subdivisions, including the books of pseudo-real life "memoirs," secret service shorts, parodies and pastiches, anthologies, and so on.*

*In the first two parts of modern Gore — five-sixths of all the detective-crime shorts ever published in book form — the degree of unity as between the two groups varies. For example, among the mixed and general collections the only unity in each separate book lies in the fact that all the stories are written by the same author and are therefore stamped with a consistent, uniform style. Occasionally, it is true, the author ties up the stories by using the Scheherazade method (one person relating all the tales), or the Decameron approach (various people telling the stories); but these and similar devices add only a superficial unification at best.*

*In the second group, the degree of unity is considerably higher. While in each volume the individual stories are completely different from each other in plot, the presence of a dominating and continuing central character (like Father Brown, Max Carrados, or The Old Man in the Corner) binds the heterogeneous stories into a more cohesive and symmetrical pattern. But rarely, in a book of detective-crime short stories, does one find a creative unity greater than that implied by the stock titles* — THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE, *or* THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *or* THE CASE-BOOK OF JIMMIE LAVENDER.

*That is one of the reasons why Agatha Christie's latest series of Hercule Poirot short stories has a special and unusual appeal. It offers a unity of theme that, unlike the mathematical dictum, is larger than the sum total of the individual parts. Miss Christie's literary motif was positively inspired. True, it was made feasible only because the given name of her famous detective is Hercule; but that fortuitous circumstance in no way lessens the brilliance of her basic idea. Isn't Hercule Poirot (Agatha Christie must have asked herself) a modern Hercules? Why not, then, write a saga of modern Herculean labors in which Hercule Poirot emulates his legendary namesake? And so, Poirot, before retiring from active practice (we hope not!), decides to accept only twelve more cases — the Twelve Modern Labors of Hercules.*

*Each story stems from an ancient Herculean theme, but the symbolism*



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*is completely modernized and detectivized. Thus, in the first "labor" Poirot captures the lion of Nemea — in the modern sense, a kidnapped Pekinese (EQMM, issue of September 1944); in the eighth "labor" Poirot captures the horses of Diomedes — the modern drug peddlers (EQMM, issue of January 1945). And now — the sixth labor in point of classical sequence — Poirot deals with the iron-beaked birds of Stymphalus — the modern blackmailers.*

*There will be other Poirotean labors in issues to come — if only Miss Christie's publishers will restrain their impatience to print the entire series in book form!*

## The Labors of Hercules:

## *The Stymphalian Birds, or*

# THE CASE OF THE VULTURE WOMEN

*by AGATHA CHRISTIE*

HAROLD WARING noticed them first, walking up the path from the lake. He was sitting outside the hotel on the terrace. The day was fine, the lake blue, the sun shining. The world seemed a pretty good place.

Harold's political career was shaping well. An under-secretaryship at the age of thirty was something to be proud of. It had been reported that the Prime Minister had said to someone that young Waring would go far. Harold was not unnaturally elated. He was young, good-looking, in good condition, and unencumbered with romantic ties.

He had decided to take a holiday somewhere off the beaten track and have a rest from everyone and everything. The hotel at Lake Stompka, though small, was comfortable. There were a few Germans and Italians there, but so far the only other English people were an elderly woman — Mrs. Rice — and her daughter, Mrs. Clayton. Harold liked them both. Elsie Clayton was pretty in an old-fashioned style, and shy. Mrs. Rice was what is called a woman of character. She was tall, with a deep voice and masterful manner — but she also had a sense of humor.

Harold had spent some pleasant hours in the company of mother and daughter. The other people in the hotel had not aroused his notice — until this afternoon.

He could not, however, help noticing the two strange women, evidently new arrivals at the hotel.

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They came up the path from the lake very slowly, and at the moment when Harold's attention was attracted to them, a cloud came over the sun. He shivered a little. Surely there was something odd about these two women? They had long curved noses, like birds, and their faces, which were curiously alike, were quite immobile. Over their shoulders they wore loose cloaks that flapped in the wind like wings.

They were not young — around fifty — and obviously sisters. Their expression was forbidding. As they passed Harold the eyes of each rested on him for a minute. It was a curious, appraising glance — almost inhuman.

Harold's impression of evil grew stronger. He noticed the hand of one of the sisters — long — clawlike. He thought: "Horrible creatures. Like birds of prey. . . ."

At that moment Mrs. Rice emerged from the hotel. Harold jumped up and drew forward a chair. She sat down and, as usual, began to knit vigorously.

Harold asked: "Did you see those two women who just went into the hotel?"

"With cloaks on? Yes, I passed them."

"Extraordinary creatures, didn't you think?"

"Well — yes, perhaps they are rather odd. Very alike also — they must be twins."

"I may be fanciful, but I distinctly felt something evil about them."

"How curious. I must look at them more closely and see if I agree with you." She added. "We'll find out from the concierge who they are."

Mrs. Rice glanced at her watch. She said:

"Tea time. I wonder if you'd mind going in and ringing the bell, Mr. Waring?"

"Not at all." When he returned he asked:

"Where's your daughter this afternoon?"

"Elsie? We went for a walk together. Part of the way round the lake and then back through the pine woods. It was lovely."

A waiter came out and took their orders. Mrs. Rice went on, her needles flying vigorously: "Elsie had a letter from her husband. She mayn't come down to tea."

"Her husband?" Harold was surprised. "I thought she was a widow."

Mrs. Rice shot him a sharp glance. She said drily: "Oh, no, Elsie isn't a widow." She added with emphasis: "Unfortunately!"

Harold was startled.

"Drink is responsible for a lot of unhappiness, Mr. Waring. . . . Elsie's husband is also insanely jealous and has a violent temper." She sighed. "It's a difficult world. I'm devoted to Elsie, she's my only child — and to see her unhappy isn't an easy thing to bear."

Harold said with real emotion: "She's such a gentle creature." Then, with hesitation: "How — did she come to marry him?"

"Philip Clayton was a very attrac-

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tive person. He had great charm, a certain amount of money — and there was no one to advise us of his real character. I had been a widow for many years. Two women, living alone, are not the best judges of a man's character."

"No, that's true." Harold felt a wave of indignation and pity sweep over him. Elsie Clayton could not be more than twenty-five at the most. He recalled the friendliness of her blue eyes, the soft droop of her mouth. He realized, suddenly, that his interest in her went a little beyond friendship. And she was tied to a brute. . . .

That evening Harold joined mother and daughter after dinner. Elsie was wearing a soft, dull pink dress. Her eyelids, he noticed, were red. She had been crying.

Mrs. Rice said briskly: "I've found out who your two harpies are, Mr. Waring. Polish ladies — of very good family, so the concierge says."

Harold looked across the room to where the Polish ladies were sitting. Elsie said with interest: "Those two women over there? With the henna-dyed hair? They look rather horrible somehow — I don't know why."

Harold said: "That's just what I thought."

Mrs. Rice said with a laugh: "I think you are both being absurd. You can't possibly tell what people are like just by looking at them. Anyway they're not likely to cross our path."

Elsie said: "We haven't got any guilty secrets!"

"Perhaps Mr. Waring has," said Mrs. Rice with a twinkle.

Harold laughed. "Not a secret in the world. My life's an open book."

And it flashed across his mind: "What fools people are who leave the straight path. A clear conscience — that's what one needs in life. With that you can face the world and tell everyone who interferes with you to go to the devil."

He felt suddenly very much alive — very strong — very much master of his fate!

Harold Waring, like many Englishmen, was a bad linguist. His French was halting, and of German and Italian he knew nothing. Up to now, these linguistic disabilities had not worried him. In most hotels on the Continent, everyone always spoke English.

But in this out-of-the-way spot, where the native language was a form of Slovak and even the concierge spoke only German in addition to her own tongue, it was galling to Harold when one of his two women friends had to act as interpreter. Mrs. Rice could even speak a little Slovak. Harold determined that he would set about learning German. He decided to buy some text books and spend a couple of hours each morning in mastering the language.

The next morning was fine, and after writing some letters, Harold looked at his watch and saw there was still time for an hour's stroll before lunch. He went down towards the lake and turned into the pine woods. He had walked there for perhaps

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five minutes when he heard an unmistakable sound. Somewhere not far away a woman was sobbing.

He paused a minute, then went in the direction of the sound. Elsie Clayton was sitting on a fallen tree, her face buried in her hands, her shoulders quivering with the violence of her grief. Harold hesitated a minute, then came up to her. He said gently: "Mrs. Clayton?" She started violently and looked up at him. He sat down beside her. "Is there anything I can do? Anything at all?"

"No — no — you're very kind. But there's nothing anyone can do"

"Is it to do with — your husband?"

She nodded. Then she wiped her eyes and took out her powder compact, struggling to regain command of herself. She said in a quavering voice: "I didn't want Mother to worry. She's so upset when she sees me unhappy. So I came out here to have a good cry. It's silly, I know. But sometimes one just feels that life is quite unbearable."

Harold said: "I'm terribly sorry."

She threw him a grateful glance. Then she said: "It's my own fault, of course. I — I wanted to marry Philip. If — it's turned out badly, I've only myself to blame."

"It's plucky of you to put it like that."

Elsie shook her head. "No, I'm not plucky. I'm not brave at all. I'm an awful coward. That's partly the trouble. I'm terrified of Philip — absolutely terrified — when he gets in one of his rages."

"You ought to leave him."

"I daren't. He — he wouldn't let me."

"Nonsense! What about a divorce?"

She shook her head slowly. "I've no grounds." She straightened her shoulders. "No, I've got to carry on. I spend a fair amount of time with Mother, you know. Philip doesn't mind that. Especially when we go somewhere off the beaten track like this." She added, the color rising, "You see, part of the trouble is that he's insanely jealous. If — if I so much as speak to another man he makes the most frightful scenes."

Harold's indignation rose. He had heard many women complain of the jealousy of a husband, and whilst professing sympathy, had been secretly of the opinion that the husband was amply justified. But Elsie Clayton was not one of those women. She had never thrown him even a flirtatious glance.

She drew away from him now with a slight shiver. She glanced up at the sky. "The sun's gone in. We'd better get back. It must be lunch time."

They got up and turned in the direction of the hotel. They had walked for perhaps a minute when they overtook a figure. They recognized her by the flapping cloak she wore. It was one of the Polish sisters.

They passed her, Harold bowing slightly. She made no response, but her eyes rested on them for a minute and there was a certain appraising quality in her glance which made Harold feel suddenly hot. He wondered if the woman had seen him

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sitting by Elsie on the tree trunk. If so, she probably thought. . . . A wave of indignation overwhelmed him. What foul minds some people have!

Somehow, Harold felt a little uneasy. . . .

That evening he went to his room a little after ten. The English mail had arrived and he had received a number of letters, some of which needed immediate answers.

He got into pajamas and a dressing gown and sat down at the desk to deal with his correspondence. He had written three letters and was just starting on the fourth when the door was suddenly flung open and Elsie Clayton staggered into the room.

Harold jumped up. Elsie had pushed the door to behind her and was standing clutching at the chest of drawers. Her breath was coming in great gasps, her face like chalk. She gasped out: "It's my husband! He arrived unexpectedly. I — I think he'll kill me. He's mad — quite mad. I came to you. Don't let him find me."

She took a step or two forward, swaying so much that she almost fell. Harold put out an arm to support her.

As he did so, the door was flung open and a man stood in the doorway. He was of medium height, with thick eyebrows and a sleek dark head. In his hand he carried a heavy car spanner. His voice rose high and shook with rage. He almost screamed the words: "So that Polish woman was right! You *are* carrying on with this fellow!"

Elsie cried: "No, no, Philip. It's not true. You're wrong."

Harold thrust her swiftly behind him, as Clayton advanced. Clayton cried: "Wrong, am I? When I find you here in his room? You she devil, I'll kill you for this!"

With a swift sideways movement he dodged Harold's arm. Elsie ran to the other side of Harold, who swung around to fend the other off.

But Clayton had only one idea, to get at his wife. He swerved around again. Elsie, terrified, rushed out of the room. Clayton dashed after her, and Harold, with not a moment's hesitation, followed him.

Elsie had darted back into her own bedroom at the end of the corridor. Harold could hear the sound of the key turning in the lock, but not in time. Clayton wrenched the door open. He disappeared into the room and Harold heard Elsie cry out. In another minute Harold burst in after them.

Elsie was standing at bay against the curtains of the window. As Harold entered, Clayton rushed at her, brandishing his weapon. She gave a terrified cry, then, snatching up a heavy paper weight from the desk beside her, she flung it at him. The man went down like a log. Elsie screamed. Harold stopped, petrified, in the doorway. The girl fell on her knees beside her husband. He lay quite still.

Outside in the passage, there was the sound of a bolt being drawn back. Elsie jumped up and ran to Harold.

"Please — please" — her voice was

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low and breathless — "go back to your room. They'll come — they'll find you here."

Harold nodded. He took in the situation like lightning. For the moment, Philip Clayton was *hors de combat*. But Elsie's screams might have been heard. If he were found in her room it could only cause embarrassment and misunderstanding. He had his career to think of, too. As noiselessly as possible, he sprinted down the passage and back into his room. Just as he reached it, he heard the sound of an opening door.

He sat in his room for nearly half an hour waiting. He dared not go out. Sooner or later Elsie would come.

After a while there was a light tap on his door. Harold jumped to open it. It was not Elsie who came in but her mother. Harold was aghast at her appearance. She looked suddenly years older. Her gray hair was dishevelled and there were deep circles under her eyes. He sprang up and helped her to a chair. She sat down, her breath coming painfully. Harold said quickly: "You look all in, Mrs. Rice. Can I get you something?" She shook her head.

"No. Never mind me. I'm all right, really. It's only the shock. A terrible thing has happened."

"Is Clayton seriously injured?"

"Worse than that. He's *dead*. . . ."

The room spun round. A feeling as of icy water trickling down his spine rendered Harold incapable of speech for a moment or two. He repeated dully: "*Dead*?"

Mrs. Rice nodded. "The corner of the paperweight caught him right on the temple and he fell back with his head on the iron fender. I don't know which it was that killed him — but he is certainly dead. I have seen death often enough to know."

Disaster — that was the word that rang insistently in Harold's brain. Disaster, disaster, disaster . . . He said vehemently: "It was an accident . . . I saw it happen."

"Of course it was an accident. *I* know that. But — but — is anyone else going to think so? I'm — frankly, I'm frightened, Harold!"

Harold said slowly: "Elsie can confirm my story."

"Yes, and you can confirm hers. That — that's just it!"

Harold's brain, naturally a keen and cautious one, saw her point. He reviewed the whole thing and appreciated the weakness of their position. Himself and Elsie spending a certain amount of time together. The fact that they had been seen together in the pine woods by one of the Polish women. The Polish ladies apparently spoke no English, but they might nevertheless understand it a little. The woman might have known the meaning of words like "jealousy" and "husband" if she had chanced to overhear their conversation.

Anyway it was clear that something she had said to Clayton had aroused his jealousy. And then — his death. And when Clayton had died, he, Harold, had been in Elsie's room.

There was nothing to show that he had not deliberately assaulted Philip

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Clayton with the paperweight. Nothing to show that the jealous husband had not actually found them together. There was only his word and Elsie's.

A cold fear gripped him. He did not imagine that either he or Elsie was in danger of being condemned to death for a murder they had not committed. Surely, in any case, it could be only a charge of manslaughter brought against them. (Did they have manslaughter in these foreign countries?) But even if they were acquitted of blame there would have to be an inquiry — it would be reported in all the papers. *An English man and woman accused — jealous husband — rising politician.* Yes, it would mean the end of his political career.

He said on an impulse: "Can't we get rid of the body somehow?"

Mrs. Rice's astonished and scornful look made him blush. "My dear Harold, this isn't a detective story! To attempt a thing like that would be quite crazy."

"I suppose it would." He groaned. "Isn't there anything we can do? Anything to avoid this frightful disaster?"

There, it was out — *disaster!* Terrible — unforeseen — utterly damning. They stared at each other.

Mrs. Rice said hoarsely: "Elsie — my little Elsie. I'd do anything. . . . It will kill her if she has to go through a thing like this." And she added: "You too, your career — everything."

Harold managed to say: "Never mind me." But he did not mean it.

Mrs. Rice went on bitterly: "And all so unfair — so utterly untrue. It's not as though there had ever been anything between you. I know that."

Harold suggested, catching at a straw, "You'll be able to say that."

"Yes, if they believe me. But you know what these people out here are like."

Harold agreed gloomily. To the continental mind, there would undoubtedly be a guilty connection between himself and Elsie. "Yes," he added, "we're not in England, worse luck."

"Ah!" Mrs. Rice lifted her head. "That's true. It's not England. I wonder now if something could be done — How much money have you?"

"Not much with me. I could wire for money, of course."

Mrs. Rice said: "We may need a good deal. I think it's worth trying."

Harold felt a faint lifting of despair. He said: "What is your idea?"

"We haven't a chance of concealing the death ourselves, but I do think there's just a chance of hushing it up *officially!* For one thing, the manager of the hotel will be on our side. He'd much rather have the thing hushed up. It's my opinion that in these out of the way little Balkan countries you can bribe anyone. The police are probably more corrupt than anyone else!"

Harold said slowly: "Do you know, I believe you're right."

Mrs. Rice went on: "Fortunately, I don't think anyone in the hotel heard anything."

"Who has the room next to Elsie's

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on the other side from yours?"

"The two Polish ladies. They didn't hear anything. They'd have come out into the passage if they had. Philip arrived late, nobody saw him but the night porter. Do you know, Harold, I believe it will be possible to hush the whole thing up — and get Philip's death certified as due to natural causes! It's just a question of bribing high enough — and finding the right man — probably the Chief of Police!"

Harold smiled faintly. "It's rather Comic Opera, isn't it? But we can try."

Mrs. Rice was energy personified. First the manager was summoned. Harold remained in his room, keeping out of it; he and Mrs. Rice had agreed that the story told had better be that of a quarrel between husband and wife. Elsie's youth and prettiness would command more sympathy.

On the following morning various police officials arrived and were shown up to Mrs. Rice's room. They left at midday. Harold had wired for money but otherwise had taken no part in the proceedings — indeed, he would have been unable to do so, since none of the official personages spoke English.

At twelve o'clock Mrs. Rice came to his room. The relief on her face told its own story. She said: "It worked!"

"Thank heaven! You've really been marvelous! It seems incredible."

"By the ease with which it went, you might almost think it was quite normal. They practically held out their hands right away. It's — it's rather disgusting, really!"

Harold said drily: "This isn't the moment to quarrel with the corruption of the public services. How much?"

"The tariff's rather high." She read out a list of figures. Harold's comment was merely: "The night porter doesn't get much, does he? I suppose it's mostly a question of gold lace."

"The manager stipulated that the death should not have taken place in his hotel at all. The official story will be that Philip had a heart attack in the train. He'll be recorded as having died at the station before this. It's wonderful what the police can do when they try!"

"Well," said Harold, "thank God *our* police force isn't like that." In a superior, British mood he went down to lunch. . . .

After lunch Harold usually joined Mrs. Rice and her daughter for coffee. He decided to make no change in his usual behavior. This was the first time he had seen Elsie since the night before. She was very pale and obviously still suffering from shock, but she made a gallant endeavor to behave as usual.

They commented on a new guest who had just arrived, trying to guess his nationality. Harold thought a mustache like that must be French — Elsie said German — and Mrs. Rice thought he might be Spanish.

There was no one else but themselves on the terrace, with the exception of the two Polish ladies, who were sitting at the extreme end, both doing fancy work. As always, Harold felt a

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queer shiver of apprehension pass over him. Those curved beaks of noses, those long clawlike hands!

A page boy approached and told Mrs. Rice she was wanted. She rose and followed him. At the entrance to the hotel they saw her encounter a police official in full uniform.

Elsie caught her breath. "You don't think — anything's gone wrong?"

"Oh, no, no, nothing of that kind."

But Harold knew a sudden pang of fear. He said: "Your mother's been wonderful!"

"I know. Mother is a great fighter. She'll never sit down under defeat." She shivered. "But it's all horrible!"

"Now, don't dwell on it. It's all over and done with. The past is the past. Try never to think of it again."

Mrs. Rice came back. By the expression on her face they saw that all was well.

"It gave me quite a fright," she said almost gaily. "But it was only a formality about some papers. Everything's all right, my children. We're out of the shadow. I think we might order ourselves a liqueur on the strength of it." The liqueur was ordered and came. They raised their glasses.

Mrs. Rice said: "To the future!"

Harold smiled at Elsie: "To your happiness!"

"And to you — to your success! I'm sure you're going to be a great man."

They felt gay, almost lighthearted.

From the far end of the terrace the two bird-like women rose. They came across the stone flags. With little bows they sat down by Mrs. Rice. One of them began to speak. The other one let her eyes rest on Elsie and Harold. There was a little smile on her lips. It was not, Harold thought, a nice smile. . . .

He looked over at Mrs. Rice. She was listening to the Polish woman, and though he couldn't understand a word, the expression on Mrs. Rice's face was clear enough. All the old anguish had come back. She listened and occasionally spoke briefly.

Presently the two sisters rose and with stiff little bows went inside.

Harold said hoarsely: "What is it?"

Mrs. Rice answered him in the quiet, hopeless tones of despair.

"Those women are going to *blackmail* us. They heard everything last night. And now we've tried to hush it up, it makes the whole thing a thousand times worse. . . ."

Harold was down by the lake. He had been walking feverishly for over an hour, trying by sheer physical energy to still the clamor of despair that had attacked him.

He came at last to the spot where he had first noticed the two grim women who held his life and Elsie's in their evil talons. He said aloud: "Curse them! Damn them for a pair of devilish blood-sucking harpies!"

A slight cough made him spin round. He found himself facing the luxuriantly mustached stranger, who had just come out from the shade of the trees. Harold, at a loss, said some-

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what ridiculously:

"Oh, — er — good afternoon."

In perfect English the other said: "But for you, I fear, it is not a good afternoon?"

"Well, er — I —"

"You are, I think, in trouble, Monsieur? Can I be of any assistance?"

"Oh, no thanks, no thanks! Just blowing off steam, you know."

"But I think you know that I *could* help you. I am correct, am I not, in connecting your troubles with two ladies who were sitting on the terrace just now?"

"Do you know anything about them? Who are you, anyway?"

As though confessing to royal birth the little man said modestly: "I am Hercule Poirot. Shall we walk a little way into the wood while you tell me your story? As I say, I think I can aid you."

To this day Harold is not certain what made him suddenly pour out the whole story to a man to whom he had spoken only a few minutes before. Perhaps it was overstrain.

Poirot listened in silence. Once or twice he nodded his head gravely. When Harold came to a stop the other spoke dreamily:

"The Stymphalian Birds, with iron beaks, that feed on human flesh and dwell by the Stymphalian Lake. Yes, it accords very well."

"I beg your pardon," said Harold.

Hercule Poirot smiled. "I reflect, that is all. I have, you understand, my own way of looking at things. Now as to this business of yours. You are very unpleasantly placed."

"I don't need you to tell me that!"

Poirot went on: "It is a serious business — blackmail. These harpies will force you to pay — and pay — and pay again! And if you defy them, well, what happens?"

"The whole thing comes out. My career's ruined and a wretched girl who's never done anyone any harm will be put through hell. God knows what the end of it all will be!"

"Therefore," said Hercule Poirot, "something must be done!"

"What?" Poirot leaned back, half closing his eyes. "It is the moment for the castanets of bronze."

Harold said: "Are you quite mad?"

"*Mais non!* I strive only to follow the example of my great predecessor, the hero Hercules. Have a few hours patience, my friend. By tomorrow I may be able to deliver you from your persecutors."

Harold came down the following morning to find Poirot sitting alone on the terrace. In spite of himself Harold had been impressed by Poirot's promises. He came up to him now and asked anxiously: "Well?"

Poirot beamed on him. "Everything has settled itself satisfactorily."

"But what has happened?"

"I have employed the castanets of bronze. Or, in modern parlance, I have caused metal wires to hum — in short I have employed the telegraph! Your Stymphalian Birds, Monsieur, have been removed to where they will be unable to exercise their ingenuity

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for some time to come."

"They were wanted by the police?"

"Precisely."

Harold drew a deep breath. "How marvelous! I never thought of that." He rose. "I must find Mrs. Rice and Elsie and tell them."

"They know."

"Oh, good." Harold sat down again. "Tell me just what —" he broke off.

Coming up the path were two figures with flapping cloaks and profiles like birds.

Harold exclaimed: "I thought you said they had been taken away!"

Hercule Poirot followed his glance: "Oh, those ladies? They are very harmless Polish ladies of good family, as the porter told you. Their appearance is, perhaps, not very pleasing, but that is all."

"But I don't understand."

"No, you do not understand! It is the *other* ladies who were wanted by the police — the resourceful Mrs. Rice and the lachrymose Mrs. Clayton! It is they who are well-known birds of prey. Those two, they make their living by blackmail, *mon ami*."

Harold felt the world spinning round him. He said faintly: "And the man who was killed?"

"No one was killed. There was no man!"

"But I *saw* him!"

"Oh, no. The tall deep-voiced Mrs. Rice is a very successful male impersonator. It was she who played the part of the husband — without her gray wig and suitably made up for the part." He leaned forward and tapped the other on the knee. "You must not be too credulous, my friend. The police of a country are not so easily bribed — they are probably not to be bribed at all — certainly not when it is any question of murder!

"These women trade on the average Englishman's ignorance of foreign languages. It's Mrs. Rice who interviews the manager; the police arrive and go to *her* room. But what actually passes? You do not know. Perhaps she has lost a brooch — something of that kind. Any excuse to arrange for the police to come *so that you shall see them.*

"For the rest, what actually happens? You wire for money, a lot of money, and you hand it over to Mrs. Rice, who is in charge of all the negotiations! And that is that.

"But they are greedy, these birds of prey. They have seen that you have taken an unreasonable aversion to these two unfortunate Polish ladies. The ladies in question come and hold a perfectly innocent conversation with Mrs. Rice and she cannot resist repeating the game. She knows you cannot understand what is being said. So you will have to send for more money, which Mrs. Rice will distribute to a fresh set of people."

Harold drew a deep breath. "And Elsie —?"

Poirot averted his eyes. "She played her part very well. She always does. Everything is very pure — very innocent. She appeals, not to sex, but to chivalry."

He added dreamily: "That is always successful with Englishmen."

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*EQMM invites you to pay another visit to the Great Cham of literature — Dr. Sam: Johnson, lexicographer and 18th century detector. Join the Sage of Fleet Street and his indispensable "Watson" in their fourth adventure in crime, as not recorded in the immortal* LIFE *but as "discovered" by Lillian de la Torre.*

*In her letter to the Editor, the gifted author of this truly distinguished series of detective tales adds the following footnotes to "The Wax-Work Cadaver": "If you had dunned me for [the story] I would have sent it sooner. However, I like to age these things a bit and scrutinize them for 'bugs' . . . 'The Wax-Work Cadaver' practically wrote itself [Editor's note: another classic example of understatement!]. All the necessary details are matters of fact — the mystery, needless to say, invented — but the Surgeons' Hall angle is fact, the location of the Wax-Work is fact (somewhat blurred because authorities cannot agree where it was when), the incredible Mother Shipton is fact, and all the wax-works named actually existed except the rogues' gallery, which was first thought of by Madam Tussaud.*

*"This is the first story in which I have tampered with Johnson chronology. Boswell was actually making the Grand Tour from August 1763 to January 1766; but he only met Johnson in May 1763, and the story had to be dated before 1765 (the street-signs were taken down before 1766)."*

*All this to give you some small idea of the scrupulous care, the indefatigable research, the constant striving for perfection, that go into Miss de la Torre's unique efforts in the field of the "modern" detective short story. As Carl Sandburg once wrote: "Call hallelujah, call amen. . . . The strong men keep coming on," and "call deep thanks" — the strong women, too!*

# THE WAX-WORK CADAVER

(as related by James Boswell: 1763)

*by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE*

DR. CLARKE, Successor to Mrs. SALMON, and Worker in Wax to Surgeons' Hall, displays Mrs. *Salmon's* famous WAX-WORKS new-furbish'd:

INCLUDING The Royal Off Spring: Or, the Maid's Tragedy Represented in Wax Work, with many Moving Figures and these Histories Following. King *Charles* I upon the Fatal Scaffold, attended by Dr. *Juxon* the Bishop of *London*, and the Lieutenant of the *Tower*, with the Executioner and Guards waiting on our Royal Martyr. The Royal Seraglio, or the Life and Death of *Mahomet* the Third, with the Death of *Ireniae* Princess of *Persia*, and the fair Sultaness *Urania*. *Margaret* Countess of *Henningburgh*, Lying upon a Bed of State, with her Three hundred and Sixty-Five Children, all born at one Birth, and baptiz'd by the names of *Johns* and *Elizabeths*, occasion'd by the rash Wish of a poor beggar Woman. Old Mother *Shipton* that Famous *English* Prophetess, which foretold the Death of the *White* King.

LIKEWISE: Our late most august Sovereign King *George* II. lying in his State Robes, with two Angels supporting the



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Crown over his Head; also a fine Figure of Peace laying the Olive Branches at his Feet. His Majesty the King of *Prussia; with our gracious Sovereign's chief General in Germany*, Prince *Ferdinand* of *Brunswick*. As also those pernitious Villains and Knights of the Road *Dick Turpin* and *James Maclaine* the *Gentleman Highwayman;* all done to the Life in Wax by the said Dr. *Clarke* with so much Variety of Invention, that it is wonderfully Diverting to all Lovers of Art and Ingenuity, and may be seen at the Sign of the Salmon near St. *Dunstan's* Church.

Such is the hand-bill which lies among the *collectanea* for my account of my illustrious friend, Dr. Sam: Johnson; where in truth it sorts ill with the stately epistles, pious prayers, and learned dissertations in whose company it lies.

No less ill, to be seen to this day at the Wax-Work, sorts the waxen effigy of my learned friend with its companions; for it is menaced on the one side by the effigy of Maclaine, in the very attitude of "Stand and deliver!"; while it is flanked on the other by the wax-work cadaver of Laurence, Earl Ferrers, who was hanged and laid out in his wedding-suit, and lies thus in the Wax-Work, done in wax for all to see. Between the maccaroni highwayman and the murderous Earl sits my illustrious friend in waxen contemplation. How he came to sit thus forms the substance of my tale.

In the year 1763 I was a young springald of two-and-twenty, new come from my native Edinburgh, and on fire to explore the manifold pleasures of the metropolis. The year was made memorable, and the pleasures of the metropolis were enhanced, by my newly-formed acquaintanceship with the *Great Cham* of literature, Sam: Johnson the lexicographer. Though separated in age by above thirty years, we were mighty cordial together.

Thus it fell out that on a day in October I burst into my friend's lodging by Inner Temple Gate with Dr. Clarke's broadside in my hand, and desired that he would accompany me thither.

"No, sir," replied Johnson, "I saw the Wax-Work in my salad days, and I'll go no more; what have I to do with Dick Turpin and Mother Shipton?"

"Come, sir," I urged, "surely the authour of *Irene* will not behold unmoved the waxen history of the Royal Seraglio."

"Sir," said Johnson, "no man stands less in need of instruction concerning the history of the unhappy Irene. But come, Mr. Boswell, if wax-works be your fancy, be guided by me, I'll shew you wax-works that shall astonish and instruct you. Do you but accompany me to Surgeons' Hall, there you shall see every organ of the human frame moulded in wax and coloured to the life. 'Tis as good as seeing some culprit anatomized."

"I nauseate anatomies," I exclaimed boldly. "Pray, Mr. Johnson, indulge me; for I never saw our late worthy sovereign in the flesh, and I am ambitious to look upon him in wax."

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"Well, well," said my kind friend indulgently, "I see you must have your way. We'll stay no longer, for 'tis but a step to the sign of the Salmon."

So saying he clapped his plain three-cornered hat over his little rusty wig, and we set out.

It was a sunny day, but the wind was high; all up and down the street the wooden street-signs flapped and creaked on their irons over the heads of the passers-by. Past Middle Temple Gate was to be seen the ancient sign of the Devil Tavern — a crude St. Dunstan with the tongs ready, and the Devil leering over his shoulder.

"This is an ancient work of art, sir," I remarked to my companion, indicating the painting with a smile.

" 'Tis an ancient house," replied my friend. "This was Ben Jonson's Apollo Tavern, where he lorded it over the wits; and from here by an underground way he made good his escape into the Strand when the watch came to take him for stabbing a fellow-player."

"Pray tell me the tale," I begged.

"Not so, sir," replied Johnson, "for it has been too often rehearsed; but I'll tell you another, which not every man knows, that shall serve for your introduction to the Wax-Work."

"Do so, sir," I cried eagerly.

We turned into the wide thoroughfare just as, down the street, the giants of St. Dunstan's Church lifted their heavy clubs and struck the quarter, wagging their heads.

" 'Twas during the days of the Pretender," began Johnson, "when one night the Duke of Montague makes up a party of pleasure at the Devil Tavern, and Heidegger the Swiss Count made one. No sooner was Heidegger convinced in liquor, so that he lay like one dead, but Montague sends up the street in haste for this very Mrs. Salmon whose wax-works we are to see. She took a cast of his face, he knowing no more than the dead of what she did, and so made a mask in wax and painted it to the life. Montague, sir, turns out a friend in Heidegger's clothes and the wax-work mask, and carries him the very next night to the masquerade, where Heidegger was employed. Up gets the false Heidegger, and in a voice like the Bull of Bashan cries out for — the Jacobite anthem! The true Heidegger was beside himself."

"Is this the way of it," I enquired curiously, "is a wax-work made thus, from a casting of the features?"

"I cannot say," replied my friend, "but you may soon know, for here we are at the sign of the Salmon."

I looked curiously at the old house, hunched against the old gray stones of St. Dunstan's. The gilded salmon hung on its iron over our heads. A narrow deepset doorway led to the display. Beside it was affixed a bill; I paused to read it with attention.

My learned friend peered over my shoulder with his near-sighted eyes.

"Here is riches," he murmured, "The Royal Court of England, one hundred fifty figures — the Rites of Moloch — the overthrow of Queen

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Voaditia — come, Mr. Boswell, let us make haste to view these wonders."

I, however, lingered to peruse the bill to its end:

". . . all new-furbished and exhibitted by Dr. *Clarke* of *Chancery-lane.*

RUN OFF from his Master, my Apprentice *Jem Blount*, being a tall likely lad, fresh-coloured, marked with the Small-pox, had on when last seen fustian breeches, leather shoes without buckles, blue stockings, a red waist-coat having very particular pewter buttons like a joined serpent, and a dirty baize apron. Any person, who can give any account where he is, shall have *Ten Shillings Reward*, to be paid by Dr. *Clarke*, Surgeon, of *Chancery-lane*, which will greatly satisfy the said Dr. *Clarke*.

"Come, Mr. Boswell," cried my friend, "you waste time in this reading; for you may depend upon it, *Jemmy Blount* is not a wax-work."

So saying, he propelled me up the narrow stair and into the exhibit of MRS. SALMON'S WAX-WORK.

I own I gazed with awe at the crowded hall. Every appurtenance of majesty adorned the wax-work presentments of the dead Kings and Queens of England. First to strike my eye was the recumbent figure of his late sacred Majesty George II of blessed memory. Peace, laying the olives at his feet, seemed to quiver with life; the angels, suspended on wires, actually floated in the light air; bent over the bier, as if in reverent grief, a man's figure had life in every limb. I regarded the mourner, a fine figure of a man, tall, broad in the shoulder, soberly clothed in mulberry broadcloth, with a full light wig hiding his face.

"What artistry!" I cried to my friend, "does it not seem to you that these angels must stir their wings and fly away, or yonder mourner at King George's bier rise and speak to us?"

The words were hardly out of my mouth when the hair prickled on my scalp and a cry escaped me, for the man at the King's bier rose slowly to his feet and faced us.

"Your servant, sirs," he said easily.

I could only gape.

"Permit me, gentlemen," said the man in mulberry, "It is sixpence to see the wax-works, and I will be your cicerone. Dr. Clarke, gentlemen, at your service."

My companion tendered a shilling before I could recover from my stupor. I stared at the surgeon-turned-wax-worker. I cannot say by what eccentricity or parsimony the man wore a light wig; his long face was the colour of leather, his deep-sunk eyes were dark under heavy tufts of black brow. His half-smile shewed white teeth. His brown hands were the long fine hands of a surgeon.

He took my friend's shilling, finished smoothing into place the robes of the wax-work king upon which he had been engaged, and proceeded to display the wax-work.

My learned companion soon tired of gazing, and began in his penetrating voice a discourse upon the philosophy of wax-works.

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"For I hold, sir," said he argumentatively, "that to present to the eyes of the young and the untutored such effigies as these of Queen Elizabeth and the Court of England is at once to instruct and to edify them; but what useful purpose can be served, sir, by perpetuating in wax the ridiculous romantick legend of the too-prolific Countess or the vulgar prophecies of Mother Shipton —

"While as to the enshrining of these two ruffians —" he waved a contemptuous hand at Turpin, standing a-straddle in his buckskins, and Maclaine, presenting his pistol, with the crape mask covering his eyes — "what is it but the enshrining crime, and reviving a bad example rightly eclipsed on Tyburn Tree?"

"I am sorry they offend you, sir," said Dr. Clarke candidly, "for it is my intention thus to perpetuate many another object of publick interest. Maclaine I have only just completed," he eyed the effigy affectionately, "it is the best thing I have ever done; and I have in process no less a malefactor than Earl Ferrers."

"In process?" I cried eagerly, "Pray, sir, will you not gratify us with a sight of it, for I have a great curiosity to see how these things are made?"

The surgeon hesitated.

"Pray, sir, do," urged my companion, ever eager to be instructed.

"As to how they are made," said the surgeon slowly, "you will learn little in my work-room. These effigies you see, that are the work of my predecessor, are but coarsely cast in wax, and the limbs tied together and so drest; and one mould serves for many faces, as you may see if you compare the ladies of the harem and the ladies of the English Court."

"How then is a likeness obtained?" asked Johnson, indicating the well-known piscine face of the late monarch.

"This is my work," replied the surgeon proudly, "for I model direct in the wax and colour it from the life. These faces —" he jerked his head at the Romans and the Turks — "are but masks, they have nothing under them; but *my* faces are built from within. Stay, you shall see. Pray step this way."

He led the way to the door, and stood aside to bow us through. Beside the door, propped on crutches, stood the famous image of Mother Shipton: a gnarled nut-cracker countenance, coarse hair crowned with a hat like a steeple, a sombre cloak thrown over the shoulders.

"After you, Mr. Boswell," said my courteous friend with an inclination.

"No, sir, after you."

The contest of courtesy prolonged itself, until, to end it, I bowed and stepped through the door. To my utter amazement, there was a creak and a clatter, and I felt my breech saluted with an unmistakable kick from behind. I turned dumb-founded, to realize that both the surgon and my friend had burst into roars of laughter.

"Alack, Mr. Boswell, this by itself repays my shilling," declared my

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friend, wiping his eyes. I could not believe that it was he who had thus assaulted me; but it was surely not the surgeon? My perplexity was resolved when my friend, still laughing, bade me stand back.

"I had taken precedence of you at first," he remarked, "but I have been here before."

So saying, he stepped over the door-sill; when with a creak and a clatter the witch-like figure by the door lifted her jointless leg and delivered a well-placed kick. My cumbersome friend eluded its effect dexterously, and grinned back at me.

"How is this managed?" I asked the grinning surgeon.

" 'Tis done by clock-work," replied Dr. Clarke, "as you step on this board on the threshold, a trip is actuated that sets the figure in motion; 'tis the very devil to keep it oiled, but the results repay the exertion."

Speaking thus, he led us down the stair and through a backward passage into his workroom.

It smelled of hot wax, with a musty effluvium. Long windows looked into a yard filled with miscellaneous lumber. In the room was a vat as long as a baker's kneading-trough; a glowing brick oven big enough to roast an ox; and a long table, fit to carve an ox.

At the table stood a young man, a tall likely lad, fresh-faced, marked with the small-pox, wearing leather shoes without buckles and a dirty baize apron.

On the table before him was a collection of limbs in wax, which he was colouring with a dilution of cochineal. Johnson bent to examine them more closely; but my eyes were rivetted on the waistcoat of the fresh-faced young man. Above the baize of the apron the buttons shewed, very particular buttons of pewter, shaped like a joined serpent.

The young man set down his brush and turned with anxious mien to his master.

"What news of my brother?" he asked in a heavy voice.

"None, Micah," replied Dr. Clarke, "I went down to Water Lane again this morning, but never a hair of him has your mother seen; the young runagate is off to Sadler's Wells, like as not."

The tall young man continued to frown; he shook his head slowly.

"Jem never run off, and not told me," he said heavily, "Jem never did a thing, without he told me; by cause I'm his elder, d'ye see, and he does as I bid him. Three days he's gone, sir; 'tis not natural, and that's flat."

"Be easy, Micah," said the surgeon, "he'll return when it suits him."

Micah Blount said no more. He took up his brush and went back to his cochineal. His broad hands were surprisingly deft.

Dr. Clarke indicated the scattered limbs.

"This is Earl Ferrers," he remarked, shewing his white teeth in a grin.

I regarded the fragments with interest.

"Earl Ferrers was a fine figure of a man," said the surgeon, "I saw him

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hanged; he died with great decency."

He picked up a waxy arm.

"This arm is moulded, not cast," he remarked. "With a tall man, do you see, Mr. Boswell, the limb is longer in every proportion, every little bone of the hand is elongated; we cannot cast such limbs in the same moulds as served for Mother Shipton. They must be modelled as if the bones lay beneath. Look, here is the radius bone, here the wrist bone, you may see how the wax shapes around them. Would not you take this for an arm of flesh indeed?"

"Where is the head?" enquired Johnson.

For answer the surgeon took down a wax head where it hung on the wall.

"Is it modelled also?" asked my friend.

"No, sir, 'tis cast. I was at Surgeons' Hall when Earl Ferrers was anatomized —"

"How, anatomized!" I exclaimed in horror, "an Earl anatomized like an ordinary cadaver!"

"Yes, sir; for if he was an Earl, he was also a murderer, and the blood of his murdered steward cried aloud for justice. I was present at the scene, and made a cast from the face; so the likeness is exact, although a cast is used. Here is the wig; Earl Ferrers died in his own brown hair."

"Will there be a pall?"

"No, sir. The Earl died and was buried in his wedding suit."

The surgeon called up the back stair. An answer came from above, and presently Mrs. Clarke descended, bearing a sumptuous white brocade garment with rich silver embroidery.

"If this is not the very suit he died in," said the surgeon proudly, "'tis its twin, for Mrs. Clarke is a very Arachne with her needle."

The plump little woman beamed and bobbed; her pale eyes went into slits as her fat cheeks lifted in a grin. She hung the garment carefully against the wall.

Johnson was shaking his head over the table full of the *disjecta membra* of the dead Earl. I peered out a doorway into a dark passage, which seemed to lead into the cellars below. It smelled damp and decayed.

"Come, gentlemen," said Dr. Clarke at my elbow, "if you would see how a head is moulded, you must follow me. We shall examine," he went on, mounting the stair, "the head of Maclaine the highwayman, for I have never done a better."

He tossed aside the flapped hat and stripped off the crape mask.

"You may see, gentlemen," he said, "how the face is, as it were, built up from within. Maclaine had a plump cheek, yet you may trace that there was a cheek-bone underneath."

My near-sighted friend peered at the feature indicated. The surgeon was alight with sombre *enthusiasm;* we had clearly struck on his ruling passion. He tipped the figure toward us.

"Look," he cried, "at the shape of the head. This is no bullet head or ball of wax. The skull is longer than it is wide, and so I have modelled it. The skull, gentlemen —"

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There was a clatter on the stair, and the apprentice burst into the hall. His broad face was full of consternation. In his hand he held a blue apron; it was marked with a dreadful splash of red. The surgeon looked at him impassively, still supporting the inclined figure of the highwayman.

"What do you here?" he asked. "Get back to your work."

"The apron," stammered the lad, " 'tis Jem's, I know it well. I found it but now, 'twas stuffed into the shed with the coals."

"Be easy, boy," reiterated the surgeon, "I am persuaded that Jem has run off to Sadler's Wells; and what 'prentice would be such a blockhead, as to run to Sadler's Wells in his 'prentice garb?"

As Micah stood irresolute, my bulky friend was seized with one of those convulsive movements, to which, alas, he was always subject; he lurched heavily against the wax figure, and it crashed to the ground.

The surgeon turned in a fury. His anger fell, not on my friend, but upon the lad who had interrupted us.

"Dolt!" he rated the heavy-witted apprentice, "Blockhead! My masterpiece — a wax-work built upon new principles of natural philosophy — shattered! It was worth twenty Blounts! Be off with you!"

Johnson and I bent over the prone wax figure to assess the damage. At first glance it seemed slight. The outstretched pistol arm had broken the force of the fall, and sustained most of the damage. The pistol had flown wide. The index finger was broke clear off, and the rest of the hand was shattered. As Johnson picked up the severed wax finger, my first emotion was one of relief that the damage was no worse.

Then a cold grue of incredulous horror went through me. *Under the cracked wax of the highwayman's shattered fingers were the bones of a human hand!*

My memory of the next five minutes is confused. I remember the face of the apprentice as he gave way before the fury of the surgeon, and backed down the stairs, with the red-stained apron still in his hand. I remember we came away quickly, saying nothing, my brain reeling with our hideous discovery.

At Inner Temple Lane I would have stayed with my wise friend, but he sent me abruptly about my business. This piqued me; and although I knew him to be fully capable of bringing the affair to whatever conclusion prudence and right dictated, I resolved to take a hand in the game and see whether I did not hold a trump or two.

The event justified me. It was with triumph that I called in Inner Temple Lane the next evening after supper. Johnson was from home, but I determined to await his return.

The full moon was mounting the sky when he at last appeared, in high good humour.

"Where have you been so long, sir?" I cried peevishly.

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"Where every good Christian should go: to church," he replied, "and where you, in these villainous garments?"

"By Water Lane into *Alsatia*," I replied, naming the lawless district that lay south of Fleet-street.

"In what *bousing-ken*, with what *morts* and *culls*?" my companion questioned me in thieves' cant.

"With none," I replied, "with one Mistress Blount, of whom I have learned much of her missing son; most notably I have learned wherein he differed from Maclaine the highwayman."

"Why, as for that," my companion humoured me, "they were of a size, being tall likely fellows both; and had each a plump pudding face, if Jemmy may be judged by Micah."

"Aye," I replied, "but they were not to be confused, none the less, for Jemmy Blount was *lacking the forefinger of his right hand;* but the gentleman highwayman had his five fingers all complete."

My companion started.

"Did he so!" he cried, "now this is a lesson in *false generalization!*"

He threw on the table before him two finger bones, gray and brittle; to one, fragments of the rosy wax still adhered.

"Deceivers, lie there," he cried; and seized his three-cornered hat. "Come, make haste, Mr. Boswell."

"Whither?"

"To the Wax-Work."

"At midnight?" I cried aghast.

" 'Tis not midnight," replied my friend, "the bells of St. Dunstan's have barely gone eleven; but if it were midnight or dawn, there is not a moment to lose."

"What must we do?" I panted, trotting up Fleet-street at my friend's heels.

"Look at the *middle* finger of Maclaine the highwayman," replied my friend; and fairly ran along the footway.

Soon he was thundering on the narrow door. The sound reverberated through the empty street for a long moment. Then the two-pair-of-stairs window was flung open, and a head came out in a night-cap.

"I must see Dr. Clarke," cried Johnson.

"Alack, sir," replied a woman's voice, "he's from home."

"Let me in!" shouted Johnson.

"Yes, sir."

The narrow old house lay still as death. Next door the old gray stones of St. Dunstan's gleamed in the moon and threw a deep shadow on the face of the Wax-Work. The silence bemused my sensibilities. I seemed to hear movement in the old house, a board creaking, a door quietly pulled to. After an eternity of expectation, a white-faced serving-wench opened the heavy door.

In the shadow a barrow of potatoes was waiting by the door to trip me; I cursed it, and hastened to follow my friend and the servant-wench as they mounted the stair. In the two-pair-of-stairs sitting-room we found the mistress shivering in her bed-gown by a dying fire. She shuddered as she bade

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the girl clothe herself and fetch coals to mend the fire.

"Ma'am," says Johnson civilly, "where's your husband?"

"He's gone," said the little woman, and quivered. "He's left me."

"When?"

"Last night. He only lingered till he'd done the dead Earl wax-work, and then he went. I saw him go. I was abed, and trying to sleep, when I heard the front door slam. I looked out at my window, and there he was below me on the door-step. I saw him very plain by the light of the moon. He'd his mulberry broadcloth on, and a scarf about his throat against the night air. His hat was flapped, and he carried his portmanteau. I called to him, and he made off down Fleet-street as if the Devil was after him. Alack, sir, he's gone for good." The woman began to cry. "I knew it'd come to this, when he started in with his nasty bones and anatomies!"

My friend looked very grave. He had no consolation to give her.

"Pray, ma'am, admit us to the Wax-Work."

"You have but to go down, Mr. Johnson; the door is not locked."

"You will accompany us, ma'am."

The woman shrank at that, but Johnson was adamant. She took up the candle and followed us.

By the light of the single candle I liked the wax-works hall as little as she. It smelled to me of death. The highwayman lay where he had fallen. In the alcove beside him was extended the new wax-work, the hanged Earl in his white-and-silver.

Johnson went directly to the prone figure of the highwayman and took up the broken hand. He beckoned imperiously for the candle, and I was left beside the wax-work cadaver in the half-dark. To a man of my sensibility, the experience was harrowing. I am never free, at a wax-works, from the conviction that the figures behind me are stirring with inimical life. I seemed to hear stealthy breathing beyond the periphery of the candle's glow. My spine crawled, and my palms felt wet.

Suddenly the air was rent with scream upon scream of terrour. My companion started to his feet; Mrs. Clarke almost dropped the candle.

"Rouze up the apprentice!" cried Johnson. "Give me the candle! Come, Boswell!"

Mrs. Clarke only lingered to lock the door behind her. My friend lingered not at all, but ran full tilt down the stair and through the lower passage towards the screams, which seemed to emanate from the yard.

It was the wench who was screaming. She stood fully clothed by the shed and distended her throat with scream after scream. The candle flickered in her hand. She found words as she pointed blindly toward the shed, where the sliding of the coals had laid bare a motionless, outflung hand.

" 'Tis Jem," she wailed, "Jem said it, the vaults is full of dead men, and we'll all be murdered in our beds."

I was by Johnson's side as we flung the coals aside and uncovered a nude body. It had no head.

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"Quiet, girl," said Johnson disgustedly as he laid hold of the still, slippery figure, "have you never seen a wax-work before?"

Another candle came through the work-room, and Mrs. Clarke stood in the door-way regarding the headless figure with horror.

"O lack," she cried, "is it Micah?"

"Micah?"

"Micah's not in his bed," she said from a dry throat, "he's gone. *Where is Micah?*"

My friend looked gravely at the headless figure, the long hands with fingers not spread, the swell of the radius bone and the wrist bone.

"Come," he said, "let us go back to the Wax-Work."

The trembling women brought their candles. Passing through the work-room, Johnson paused. The smell of hot wax was gone, but the place smelled more musty than ever.

The brick furnace was cold. Johnson opened the fire-door and, taking a candle, held it within. I peered over his shoulder.

"These are strange ashes," said my friend, "they are the ashes neither of wood nor of coal, but of cloth. Pray, Mr. Boswell, reach me the poker."

He turned over the layers of blackened cloth. There was a tinkle, and he drew out of the mass a blackened thing about the size of a shilling. I held the candle as he wiped off the soot. It was a very particular pewter button, like a joined serpent.

"Jem Blount's!" I cried.

We mounted the dark stair. Mrs. Clarke turned the heavy key in the lock, and again my friend and I entered the Wax-Work. The women hung back; if truth were told, I longed to hang back with them.

My friend led me straight to the recumbent figure of the murderous Earl, lying with closed eyes and joined palms in the candle-light.

I shuddered as he touched the wax of the face, then with a jerk pulled loose the wig of brown hair. I closed my eyes as I held the candle close, then opened them with loathing to behold the skull beneath.

It was not a skull. It was not a battered head. It was a smooth expanse of uncoloured wax. My friend unsheathed his pen-knife; the blade slipped easily in to its full length. The head of the wax-work cadaver contained nothing but wax.

"Tschah," said Johnson disgustedly, "we waste time. This is the Earl's own head, cast from his death-mask. Now the hands —"

He slashed the wax of the near hand. It peeled back in a thin integument; under it was a hand of flesh, stiff and cold.

"So," said my friend, "the head is gone in the doctor's portmanteau."

"We must lay an information," I cried, "and set up the hue and cry."

"Aye," responded Johnson, "if we cannot ourselves lay the murdering villain by the heels. Let us go."

At the word I was through the door in a trice. Beyond the threshold a sense of something missing, something wrong, halted me.

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I smiled as it came to me.

"Why, sir," I called to my friend as he lingered, surveying the room about by the light of his candle, "now the master is fled, all is at sixes and sevens; even the famous parting salute of old Mother Shipton has ceased to operate."

"What, sir, no kick on the rump?" cried my curious friend. "Come, sir, you have sidled by or leapt through, or the lady had not failed you. You shall see, she will not fail me, for I shall take care to step rightly."

So saying, Johnson set down the candle-stick, and trod firmly toward the door. There was neither a click nor a clatter, but the foot of Mother Shipton lifted in a mighty sweep of skirts behind Johnson's back; when to my utter surprise my sturdy friend wheeled, caught the lifted heel, and brought the cloaked figure to the floor with a bone-shaking crash. The steeple hat rolled aside; the hair went with it. Johnson presented a pistol at the side of the head. I hurried up with my candle.

"You have caught the mad surgeon!" I cried.

"No, sir," replied Johnson, stripping the wax mask from the face beneath, "but I have caught his murderer."

I advanced the candle, and looked into the sullen face of Micah Blount.

There was no fight in Micah Blount. He marched meekly enough to the watch-house, and there we lodged him for safe-keeping. Early the next morning we had him before the magistrate.

Micah made a full confession:

"I knocked in his head," he mumbled in his heavy voice, "and then I wondered where to hide him, for I had then no conveniency to make off with the body; nor did I dare to burn it, for the mistress would be sure to smell it. Then I thought of the Wax-Work. I dressed him like Earl Ferrers, and coated the head and hands with wax; but 'twould not do. In the end I took off the head and laid out the body in the Wax-Work with the wax head to it. First I thought to melt down the wax body, but then I thought better of it, for I would need it when I could come by with a barrow and take the body off; so I hid it under the coals in the shed."

"Why did you burn the waistcoat with the pewter buttons?"

"Blood," said Micah; his eyes looked inward.

"Yet how came you," I cried, "to be wearing your brother's waistcoat?"

" 'Twas mine," said Micah, "there were the two alike. They were my mother's work, and the pewter buttons were some my uncle came by in the French wars."

"So then," said Johnson, "you donned the doctor's clothes, for you two were of a size, and put on his wig and flapped his hat over your face and took the head away in his portmanteau."

"Aye."

"And when one called to you from the window you ran as if the devil

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were at your heels; how could you know that, looking down on you from above in the moonlight, your mistress would see only a tall man wearing her husband's clothes, and think you the surgeon himself?"

Micah said nothing.

"And tonight you returned for the body, for it must be removed before the odour betrayed that it was other than wax. How did you hope to carry it safely off?" enquired Dr. Johnson.

A light dawned upon me.

"The barrow!" I cried, "The barrow of potatoes!"

Micah nodded.

" 'Twixt midnight and dawn every costermonger is abroad with his barrow," he said. "Under the potatoes I might have wheeled him swiftly and safely down Water Lane till I came to the river, and so flung him off Dung Wharf, as I flung his head the night before."

The bereaved woman wailed loudly.

"How could you," she sobbed, "how could you treat your kind master so?"

Micah ground his teeth.

"He killed my brother," he cried passionately, "he killed Jem and put him in a wax-work."

"Aye did he," struck in the serving-wench, "and for why, Jem found the vault in the cellars where he hides the bones of all the men he kills. Jem told me so, he was mortal afeared of the doctor after he saw them heaps and heaps of bones lying in the vaults, and the doctor killed him to keep his tongue from wagging."

Micah's eyes were full of tears.

"Poor lad," said Johnson with regret, "Dr. Clarke never killed anybody."

I stared in amazement.

"What of the blood on the boy's apron?"

"Not blood, Mr. Boswell — cochineal."

"Then how came the highwayman to be built upon bones?" I demanded.

"Aye," struck in the wench, "and whence came them piles of bones in the cellars? The doctor, he kept the passage locked, but Jem got in and saw 'em, piles and piles of bones."

"I carried the highwayman's finger home with me," Johnson related, "and when the wax was peeled from it any eye could see that it was no fresh bone, it was old and brittle. To make sure, I called upon my old friend the sexton of St. Dunstan's, and he admitted me to look upon the bones of the charnel-house, where they have been shovelled out to make room for the newly dead under the church floor. He gave me such another finger bone, of one who had been dead these hundreds of years, before the new church was built and the new churchyard made up the lane."

Johnson sighed.

" 'Twas a painful reminder of mortality," he said, "smelling of the grave, with the dust of ages over all. 'Twas with horror I saw that there were footprints in the dust. I followed them, and so found the passage that connects St. Dunstan's with the Wax-Work, for all these old edifices are

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honeycombed beneath with passages leading from one to another. I knew then where the doctor had found the highwayman's bones, and how his *scientifick* bent had caused him to build his wax-works like one doing an anatomy in reverse, from the inside out."

"Then why did you run so quickly to the Wax-Work when you heard about Jem Blount's finger?" I asked.

"Because the bone I had erected my speculations on," replied my learned friend, "was the *right forefinger*. I had to be sure that the surgeon had not supplied a deficiency with the charnel-house bone; I had to see for myself that the other fingers were not the fingers of Jem Blount. They were not; they were all charnel-house bones."

"How," I enquired curiously, "were you so sure that the surgeon was the cadaver and not the murderer?"

"The face was gone," replied my perspicacious friend, "but the hands were there. They were not the broad hands of Micah, but the long surgeon's fingers of the doctor."

"I marvel," I admitted, "how you smoaked Micah in the weeds of the wax-work witch."

"I did not," replied Johnson, "though I thought it possible that he might be lurking about; his secret was not safe while the wedding-suit of Earl Ferrers covered the cadaver of his murdered master. But I did not smoak him until the machinery, which had worked the day before, failed to operate. Even then it was but a surmise. I tempted him with my words. If he had not fallen into my trap, and moved, as a human being must, like a human being, not a clock-work, he might have got clean off; for a clock-work which has failed once may fail twice, and rouse no suspicion."

"What is this," enquired the magistrate, who had heard thus far with keen interest, "of Jem Blount's right forefinger?"

" 'Tis missing," replied I.

"Did this boy wear a red waistcoat with very particular pewter buttons?"

"Aye."

"Then," said the magistrate, "I can lead you to the boy. He came to me three days gone with a cock-and-bull story of his master having a heap of bones in his cellar; but he was brought to confess that he was a runaway 'prentice, and I could not credit him; and in short, he was committed to gaol for correction, and there he bides."

"Look to the young man!" cried Johnson.

Micah's face was a sickly green. As I watched him, he let go the bar he leaned on and slowly slid down in a heap.

" 'Tis a sturdy rogue," said the magistrate, as the unfortunate boy was hauled to his feet. "Pray, Mr. Johnson, how had you the address to take him single-handed?"

" 'Twas not done with address," replied Johnson with a smile, " 'twas done with an empty pistol, which I made bold to borrow from my wax-work friend, James Maclaine, the gentleman highwayman."

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*Here is a single paragraph written by André Gide, the great French literary critic, taken from his book titled* IMAGINARY INTERVIEWS, *published in 1944 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.:*

"*And speaking at random* [*of new American novelists*], *there is one recent author, Dashiell Hammett, who is doubtless not in the same class as the four great figures we began by discussing* [*Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and John Dos Passos*]. *Again it was Malraux who drew my attention to him; but for the last two years I have been vainly trying to find a copy of* THE GLASS KEY, *which Malraux specially recommended . . . Hammett, it is true, squanders his great talent on detective stories; they are unusually good ones, no doubt, like* THE THIN MAN *and* THE MALTESE FALCON, *but a little cheap — and one could say the same of Simenon. For all of that, I regard* [*Hammett's*] RED HARVEST *as a remarkable achievement, the last word in atrocity, cynicism, and horror. Dashiell Hammett's dialogues, in which every character is trying to deceive all the others and in which the truth slowly becomes visible through the haze of deception, can be compared only with the best in Hemingway. If I speak of Hammett, it is because I seldom hear his name mentioned.*"

*The last sentence is particularly astonishing to your Editor — it makes us feel like a voice in the wilderness. But it does permit a simple deduction: obviously André Gide does not read EQMM. We are sincerely desolated, Monsieur. . . .*

"*Two Sharp Knives*" *does not belong to the* RED HARVEST *school of Hammett's work.* (*How many of you recall that* RED HARVEST, *when it first appeared as a four-part serial in* "*Black Mask*," *was titled* THE CLEANSING OF POISONVILLE?) "*Two Sharp Knives*" *is deliberately less sensational, deliberately restrained both in the selection of material and the manner of telling. This conscious restraint adds to Hammett's realism, rather than detracts from it — and erases, through the process of understatement, that touch of cheapness which André Gide justly finds in overemphasized hardboiledism.*

# TWO SHARP KNIVES

*by DASHIELL HAMMETT*

On my way home from the regular Wednesday night poker game at Ben Kamsley's I stopped at the railroad station to see the 2:11 come in — what we called putting the town to bed — and as soon as this fellow stepped down from the smoking-car I recognized him. There was no mistaking his face, the pale eyes with lower lids that were as straight as if they had been drawn with a ruler, the noticeably flat-tipped bony nose, the deep cleft in his chin, the slightly hollow grayish cheeks. He was tall and thin and very neatly dressed in a dark suit, long dark overcoat, derby hat, and carried a black Gladstone bag. He looked a few years older than the forty



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he was supposed to be. He went past me towards the street steps.

When I turned around to follow him I saw Wally Shane coming out of the waiting-room. I caught Wally's eye and nodded at the man carrying the black bag. Wally examined him carefully as he went by. I could not see whether the man noticed the examination. By the time I came up to Wally the man was going down the steps to the street.

Wally rubbed his lips together and his blue eyes were bright and hard. "Look," he said out of the side of his mouth, "that's a ringer for the guy we got —"

"That's the guy," I said, and we went down the steps behind him.

Our man started towards one of the taxicabs at the curb, then saw the lights of the Deerwood Hotel two blocks away, shook his head at the taxi driver, and went up the street afoot.

"What do we do?" Wally asked. "See what he's —?"

"It's nothing to us. We take him. Get my car. It's at the corner of the alley."

I gave Wally the few minutes he needed to get the car and then closed in. "Hello, Furman," I said when I was just behind the tall man.

His face jerked around to me. "How do you —" He halted. "I don't believe I —" He looked up and down the street. We had the block to ourselves.

"You're Lester Furman, aren't you?" I asked.

He said "Yes" quickly.

"Philadelphia?"

He peered at me in the light that was none too strong where we stood. "Yes."

"I'm Scott Anderson," I said, "Chief of Police here. I —"

His bag thudded down on the pavement. "What's happened to her?" he asked hoarsely.

"Happened to whom?"

Wally arrived in my car then, abruptly, skidding into the curb. Furman, his face stretched by fright, leaped back away from me. I went after him, grabbing him with my good hand, jamming him back against the front wall of Henderson's warehouse. He fought with me there until Wally got out of the car. Then he saw Wally's uniform and immediately stopped fighting.

"I'm sorry," he said weakly. "I thought — for a second I thought maybe you weren't the police. You're not in uniform and — It was silly of me. I'm sorry."

"It's all right," I told him." Let's get going before we have a mob around us." Two cars had stopped just a little beyond mine and I could see a bellboy and a hatless man coming towards us from the direction of the hotel.

Furman picked up his bag and went willingly into my car ahead of me. We sat in the rear, Wally drove.

We rode a block in silence, then Furman asked, "You're taking me to police headquarters?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Philadelphia."

"I —" he cleared his throat, "—I

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don't think I understand you."

"You understand that you're wanted in Philadelphia, don't you, for murder?"

He said indignantly, "That's ridiculous. Murder! That's —" He put a hand on my arm, his face close to mine, and instead of indignation in his voice there now was a desperate sort of earnestness. "Who told you that?"

"I didn't make it up. Well, here we are. Come on, I'll show you."

We took him into my office. George Propper, who had been dozing in a chair in the front office, followed us in. I found the Trans-American Detective Agency circular and handed it to Furman. In the usual form it offered fifteen hundred dollars for the arrest and conviction of Lester Furman, alias Lloyd Fields, alias J. D. Carpenter, for the murder of Paul Frank Dunlap in Philadelphia on the 26th of the previous month.

Furman's hands holding the circular were steady and he read it carefully. His face was pale, but no muscles moved in it until he opened his mouth to speak. He tried to speak calmly. "It's a lie." He did not look up from the circular.

"You're Lester Furman, aren't you?" I asked.

He nodded, still not looking up.

"That's your description, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"That's your photograph, isn't it?"

He nodded, and then, staring at his photograph on the circular, he began to tremble — his lips, his hands, his legs.

I pushed a chair up behind him and said, "Sit down," and he dropped down on it and shut his eyes, pressing the lids together. I took the circular from his limp hands.

George Propper, leaning against a side of the doorway, turned his loose grin from me to Wally and said, "So that's that and so you lucky stiffs split a grand and a half reward money. Lucky Wally! If it ain't vacations in New York at the city's expense it's reward money."

Furman jumped up from the chair and screamed. "It's a lie. It's a frame-up. You can't prove anything. There's nothing to prove. I never killed anybody. I won't be framed. I won't be —"

I pushed him down on the chair again. "Take it easy," I told him. "You're wasting your breath on us. Save it for the Philadelphia police. We're just holding you for them. If anything's wrong it's there, not here."

"But it's not the police. It's the Trans-American De —"

"We turn you over to the police."

He started to say something, broke off, sighed, made a little hopeless gesture with his hands, and tried to smile. "Then there's nothing I can do now?"

"There's nothing any of us can do till morning," I said. "We'll have to search you, then we won't bother you any more till they come for you."

In the black Gladstone bag we found a couple of changes of clothes, some toilet articles, and a loaded .38 automatic. In his pockets we found a hundred and sixty-some dollars, a

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book of checks on a Philadelphia bank, business cards and a few letters that seemed to show he was in the real estate business, and the sort of odds and ends that you usually find in men's pockets.

While Wally was putting these things in the vault I told George Propper to lock Furman up.

George rattled keys in his pocket and said, "Come along, darling. We ain't had anybody in our little hoosegow for three days. You'll have it all to yourself, just like a suite in the Ritz."

Furman said, "Good night and thank you," to me and followed George out.

When George came back he leaned against the door frame again and asked, "How about you big-hearted boys cutting me in on a little of that blood money?"

Wally said, "Sure. I'll forget that two and a half you been owing me three months."

I said, "Make him as comfortable as you can, George. If he wants anything sent in, O. K."

"He's valuable, huh? If it was some bum that didn't mean a nickel to you. . . . Maybe I ought to take a pillow off my bed for him." He spit at the cuspidor and missed. "He's just like the rest of 'em to me."

I thought, "Any day now I'm going to forget that your uncle is county chairman and throw you back in the gutter." I said, "Do all the talking you want, but do what I tell you."

It was about four o'clock when I got home — my farm was a little outside the town — and maybe half an hour after that before I went to sleep. The telephone woke me up at five minutes past six.

Wally's voice: "You better come down, Scott. The fellow Furman's hung himself."

"What?"

"By his belt — from a window bar — deader'n hell."

"All right. I'm on my way. Phone Ben Kamsley I'll pick him up on my way in."

"No doctor's going to do this man any good, Scott."

"It won't hurt to have him looked at," I insisted. "You'd better phone Douglassville too." Douglassville was the county seat.

"O. K."

Wally phoned me back while I was dressing to tell me that Ben Kamsley had been called out on an emergency case and was somewhere on the other side of town, but that his wife would get in touch with him and tell him to stop at headquarters on his way home.

When, riding into town, I was within fifty or sixty feet of the Red Top Diner, Heck Jones ran out with a revolver in his hand and began to shoot at two men in a black roadster that had just passed me.

I leaned out and yelled, "What's it?" at him while I was turning my car.

"Holdup," he bawled angrily. "Wait for me." He let loose another shot that

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couldn't have missed my front tire by more than an inch and galloped up to me, his apron flapping around his fat legs. I opened the door for him, he squeezed his bulk in beside me, and we set off after the roadster.

"What gets me," he said when he had stopped panting, "is they done it like a joke. They come in, they don't want nothing but ham and eggs and coffee and then they get kind of kidding together under their breath and then they put the guns on me like a joke."

"How much did they take?"

"Sixty or thereabouts, but that ain't what gripes me so much. It's them doing it like a joke."

"Never mind," I said. "We'll get 'em."

We very nearly didn't, though. They led us a merry chase. We lost them a couple of times and finally picked them up more by luck than anything else, a couple of miles over the state line.

We didn't have any trouble taking them, once we had caught up to them, but they knew they had crossed the state line and they insisted on regular extradition or nothing, so we had to carry them on to Badington and stick them in the jail there until the necessary papers could be sent through. It was ten o'clock before I got a chance to phone my office.

Hammill answered the phone and told me Ted Carroll, our district attorney, was there, so I talked to Ted — though not as much as he talked to me.

"Listen, Scott," he asked excitedly, "what is all this?"

"All what?"

"This fiddle-de-dee, this hanky-panky."

"I don't know what you mean," I said. "Wasn't it suicide?"

"Sure it was suicide, but I wired the Trans-American and they phoned me just a few minutes ago and said they'd never sent out any circulars on Furman, didn't know about any murder he was wanted for. All they knew about him was he used to be a client of theirs."

I couldn't think of anything to say except that I would be back in Deerwood by noon. And I was.

Ted was at my desk with the telephone receiver clamped to his ear, saying, "Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Yes," when I went into the office. He put down the receiver and asked, "What happened to you?"

"A couple of boys knocked over the Red Top Diner and I had to chase 'em almost to Badington."

He smiled with one side of his mouth. "The town getting out of your hands?" He and I were on opposite sides of the fence politically and we took our politics seriously in Candle County.

I smiled back at him. "Looks like it — with one felony in six months."

"And this." He jerked a thumb towards the rear of the building, where the cells were.

"What about this? Let's talk about this."

"It's plenty wrong," he said. "I just

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finished talking to the Philly police. There wasn't any Paul Frank Dunlap murdered there that they know about; they've got no unexplained murder on the 26th of last month." He looked at me as if it were my fault. "What'd you get out of Furman before you let him hang himself?"

"That he was innocent."

"Didn't you grill him? Didn't you find out what he was doing in town? Didn't you —"

"What for?" I asked. "He admitted his name was Furman, the description fit him, the photograph was him, the Trans-American's supposed to be on the level. Philadelphia wanted him: I didn't. Sure, if I'd known he was going to hang himself — You said he'd been a client of the Trans-American. They tell you what the job was?"

"His wife left him a couple of years ago and he had them hunting for her for five or six months, but they never found her. They're sending a man up tonight to look it over." He stood up. "I'm going to get some lunch." At the door he turned his head over his shoulder to say, "There'll probably be trouble over this."

I knew that; there usually is when somebody dies in a cell.

George Propper came in grinning happily. "So what's become of that fifteen hundred fish?"

"What happened last night?" I asked.

"Nothing. He hung hisself."

"Did you find him?"

He shook his head. "Wally took a look in there to see how things was before he went off duty and found him."

"You were asleep, I suppose."

"Well, I was catching a nap, I guess," he mumbled; "but everybody does that sometimes — even Wally sometimes when he comes in off his beat between rounds — and I always wake up when the phone rings or anything. And suppose I had been awake. You can't hear a guy hanging hisself."

"Did Kamsley say how long he'd been dead?"

"He done it about five o'clock, he said he guessed. You want to look at the remains? They're over at Fritz's undertaking parlor."

I said, "Not now. You'd better go home and get some more sleep, so your insomnia won't keep you awake tonight."

He said, "I feel almost as bad about you and Wally losing all that dough as you do," and went out chuckling.

Ted Carroll came back from lunch with the notion that perhaps there was some connection between Furman and the two men who had robbed Heck Jones. That didn't seem to make much sense, but I promised to look into it. Naturally, we never did find any such connection.

That evening a fellow named Rising, assistant manager of the Trans-American Detective Agency's Philadelphia branch, arrived. He brought the dead man's lawyer, a scrawny, asthmatic man named Wheelock, with him. After they had identified the body we went back to my office for a conference.

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It didn't take me long to tell them all I knew, with the one additional fact I had picked up during the afternoon, which was that the police in most towns in our corner of the state had received copies of the reward circular.

Rising examined the circular and called it an excellent forgery: paper, style, type were all almost exactly those ordinarily used by his agency.

They told me the dead man was a well-known, respectable and prosperous citizen of Philadelphia. In 1928 he had married a twenty-two-year-old girl named Ethel Brian, the daughter of a respectable, if not prosperous, Philadelphia family. They had a child born in 1930, but it lived only a few months. In 1931 Furman's wife had disappeared and neither he nor her family had heard of her since, though he had spent a good deal of money trying to find her. Rising showed me a photograph of her, a small-featured, pretty blonde with a weak mouth and large, somewhat staring, eyes.

"I'd like to have a copy made," I said.

"You can keep that. It's one of them that we had made. Her description's on the back."

"Thanks. And he didn't divorce her?"

Rising shook his head with emphasis. "No, sir. He was a lot in love with her and he seemed to think the kid's dying had made her a little screwy and she didn't know what she was doing." He looked at the lawyer. "That right?"

Wheelock made a couple of asthmatic sounds and said, "That is my belief."

"You said he had money. About how much, and who gets it?"

The scrawny lawyer wheezed some more, said, "I should say his estate will amount to perhaps a half a million dollars, left in its entirety to his wife."

That gave me something to think about, but the thinking didn't help me out then.

They couldn't tell me why he had come to Deerwood. He seemed to have told nobody where he was going, had simply told his servants and his employees that he was leaving town for a day or two. Neither Rising nor Wheelock knew of any enemies he had. That was the crop.

And that was still the crop at the inquest the next day. Everything showed that somebody had framed Furman into our jail and that the frame-up had driven him to suicide. Nothing showed anything else. And there had to be something else, a lot else.

Some of the else began to show up immediately after the inquest. Ben Kamsley was waiting for me when I left the undertaking parlor, where the inquest had been held. "Let's get out of the crowd," he said. "I want to tell you something."

"Come on over to the office."

We went over there. He shut the door, which usually stayed open, and sat on a corner of my desk. His voice was low: "Two of those bruises showed."

"What bruises?"

He looked curiously at me for a sec-

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ond, then put a hand on the top of his head. "Furman — up under the hair — there were two bruises."

I tried to keep from shouting. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I am telling you. You weren't here that morning. This is the first time I've seen you since."

I cursed the two hoodlums who had kept me away by sticking up the Red Top Diner and demanded, "Then why didn't you spill it when you were testifying at the inquest?"

He frowned. "I'm a friend of yours. Do I want to put you in a spot where people can say you drove this chap to suicide by third-degreeing him too rough?"

"You're nuts," I said. "How bad was his head?"

"That didn't kill him, if that's what you mean. There's nothing the matter with his skull. Just a couple of bruises nobody would notice unless they parted the hair."

"It killed him just the same," I growled. "You and your *friendship* that —"

The telephone rang. It was Fritz. "Listen, Scott," he said, "there's a couple ladies here that want a look at that fellow. Is it all right?"

"Who are they?"

"I don't know 'em — strangers."

"Why do they want to see him?"

"I don't know. Wait a minute."

A woman's voice came over the wire: "Can't I please see him?" It was a very pleasant, earnest voice.

"Why do you want to see him?" I asked.

"Well, I" — there was a long pause — "I am" — a shorter pause, and when she finished the sentence her voice was not much more than a whisper — "his wife."

"Oh, certainly," I said. "I'll be right over."

I hurried out.

Leaving the building, I ran into Wally Shane. He was in civilian clothes, since he was off duty. "Hey, Scott!" He took my arm and dragged me back into the vestibule, out of sight of the street. "A couple of dames came into Fritz's just as I was leaving. One of 'em's Hotcha Randall, a baby with a record as long as your arm. You know she's one of that mob you had me in New York working on last summer."

"She know you?"

He grinned. "Sure. But not by my right name, and she thinks I'm a Detroit rum-runner."

"I mean did she know you just now?"

"I don't think she saw me. Anyways, she didn't give me a tumble."

"You don't know the other one?"

"No. She's a blonde, kind of pretty."

"O. K.," I said. "Stick around a while, but out of sight. Maybe I'll be bringing them back with me." I crossed the street to the undertaking parlor.

Ethel Furman was prettier than her photograph had indicated. The woman with her was five or six years older, quite a bit larger, handsome in a big, somewhat coarse way. Both of them

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were attractively dressed in styles that hadn't reached Deerwood yet.

The big woman was introduced to me as Mrs. Crowder. I said, "I thought your name was Randall."

She laughed. "What do you care, Chief? I'm not hurting your town."

I said, "Don't call me Chief. To you big-city slickers I'm the Town Whittler. We go back through here."

Ethel Furman didn't make any fuss over her husband when she saw him. She simply looked gravely at his face for about three minutes, then turned away and said, "Thank you," to me.

"I'll have to ask you some questions," I said, "so if you'll come across the street . . ."

She nodded. "And I'd like to ask you some." She looked at her companion. "If Mrs. Crowder will —"

"Call her Hotcha," I said. "We're all among friends. Sure, she'll come along, too."

The Randall woman said, "Aren't you the cut-up?" and took my arm.

In my office I gave them chairs and said, "Before I ask you anything I want to tell you something. Furman didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

Ethel Furman opened her eyes wide. "Murdered?"

Hotcha Randall said as if she had had the words on the tip of her tongue right along, "We've got alibis. We were in New York. We can prove it."

"You're likely to get a chance to, too," I told her. "How'd you people happen to come down here?"

Ethel Furman repeated, "Murdered?" in a dazed tone.

The Randall woman said, "Who's got a better right to come down here? She was still his wife, wasn't she? She's entitled to some of his estate, isn't she? She's got a right to look out for her own interests, hasn't she?"

That reminded me of something. I picked up the telephone and told Hammill to have somebody get hold of the lawyer Wheelock — he had stayed over for the inquest, of course — before he left town and tell him I wanted to see him. "And is Wally around?"

"He's not here. He said you told him to keep out of sight. I'll find him, though."

"Right. Tell him I want him to go to New York tonight. Send Mason home to get some sleep: he'll have to take over Wally's night trick."

Hammill said, "Oke," and I turned back to my guests.

Ethel Furman had come out of her daze. She leaned forward and asked, "Mr. Anderson, do you think I had — had anything to do with Lester's — with his death?"

"I don't know. I know he was killed. I know he left you something like half a million."

The Randall woman whistled softly. She came over and put a diamond-ringed hand on my shoulder. "Dollars?"

When I nodded, the delight went out of her face, leaving it serious. "All right, Chief," she said, "now don't be a clown. The kid didn't have a thing

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to do with whatever you think happened. We read about him committing suicide in yesterday morning's paper, and about there being something funny about it, and I persuaded her she ought to come down and —"

Ethel Furman interrupted her friend: "Mr. Anderson, I wouldn't have done anything to hurt Lester. I left him because I wanted to leave him, but I wouldn't have done anything to him for money or anything else. Why, if I'd wanted money from him all I'd've had to do would've been to ask him. Why, he used to put ads in papers telling me if I wanted anything to let him know, but I never did. You can — his lawyer — anybody who knew anything about it can tell you that."

The Randall woman took up the story: "That's the truth, Chief. For years I've been telling her she was a chump not to tap him, but she never would. I had a hard enough time getting her to come for her share now he's dead and got nobody else to leave it to."

Ethel Furman said, "I wouldn't've hurt him."

"Why'd you leave him?"

She moved her shoulders. "I don't know how to say it. The way we lived wasn't the way I wanted to live. I wanted — I don't know what. Anyway, after the baby died I couldn't stand it any more and cleared out, but I didn't want anything from him and I wouldn't've hurt him. He was always good to me. I was — I was the one that was wrong."

The telephone rang. Hammill's voice: "I found both of 'em. Wally's home. I told him. The old guy Wheelock is on his way over."

I dug out the phony reward circular and showed it to Ethel Furman. "This is what got him into the can. Did you ever see that picture before?"

She started to say "No"; then a frightened look came into her face. "Why, that's — it can't be. It's — it's a snapshot I had — have. It's an enlargement of it."

"Who else has one?"

Her face became more frightened, but she said, "Nobody that I know of. I don't think anybody else could have one."

"You've still got yours?"

"Yes. I don't remember whether I've seen it recently — it's with some old papers and things — but I must have it."

I said, "Well, Mrs. Furman, it's stuff like that that's got to be checked up, and neither of us can dodge it. Now there are two ways we can play it. I can hold you here on suspicion till I've had time to check things up, or I can send one of my men back to New York with you for the check-up. I'm willing to do that if you'll speed things up by helping him all you can and if you'll promise me you won't try any tricks."

"I promise," she said. "I'm as anxious as you are to —"

"All right. How'd you come down?"

"I drove," the Randall woman said. "That's my car, the big green one across the street."

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"Fine. Then he can ride back with you, but remember, no funny business."

The telephone rang again while they were assuring me there would be no funny business. Hammill said: "Wheelock's here."

"Send him in."

The lawyer's asthma nearly strangled him when he saw Ethel Furman. Before he could get himself straightened out I asked, "This is really Mrs. Furman?"

He wagged his head up and down, still wheezing.

"Fine," I said. "Wait for me. I'll be back in a little while." I herded the two women out and across the street to the green car. "Straight up to the end of the street and then two blocks left," I told the Randall woman, who was at the wheel.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To see Shane, the man who's going to New York with you."

Mrs. Dober, Wally's landlady, opened the door for us.

"Wally in?" I asked.

"Yes, indeedy, Mr. Anderson. Go right on up." She was staring with wide-eyed curiosity at my companions while talking to me.

We went up a flight of stairs and I knocked on his door.

"Who is it?" he called.

"Scott."

"Come on in."

I pushed the door open and stepped aside to let the women in.

Ethel Furman gasped, "Harry!" and stepped back.

Wally had a hand behind him, but my gun was already out in my hand. "I guess you win," he said.

I said I guessed I did and we all went back to headquarters.

"I'm a sap," he complained when he and I were alone in my office. "I knew it was all up as soon as I saw those two dames going into Fritz's. Then, when I was ducking out of sight and ran into you, I was afraid you'd take me over with you, so I had to tell you one of 'em knew me, figuring you'd want to keep me under cover for a little while anyhow — long enough for me to get out of town. And then I didn't have sense enough to go.

"I drop in home to pick up a couple of things before I scram and that call of Hammill's catches me and I fall for it plenty. I figure I'm getting a break. I figure you're not on yet and are going to send me back to New York as the Detroit rum-runner again to see what dope I can get out of these folks and I'll be sitting pretty. Well, you fooled me, brother, or didn't — Listen, Scott, you didn't just stumble into that accidentally, did you?"

"No. Furman had to be murdered by a copper. A copper was most likely to know reward circulars well enough to make a good job of forging one. Who printed that for you?"

"Go on with your story," he said. "I'm not dragging anybody in with me. It was only a poor mug of a printer that needed dough."

"O. K. Only a copper would be sure enough of the routine to know how things would be handled. Only a

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copper — one of my coppers — would be able to walk into his cell, bang him across the head and string him up on the — Those bruises showed."

"They did? I wrapped the blackjack in a towel, figuring it would knock him out without leaving a mark anybody'd find under the hair. I seem to've slipped up a lot."

"So that narrows it down to my coppers," I went on, "and — well — you told me you knew the Randall woman, and there it was, only I figured you were working with them. What got you into this?"

He made a sour mouth. "What gets most saps in jams? A yen for easy dough. I'm in New York, see, working on that Dutton job for you, palling around with bootleggers and racketeers, passing for one of them; and I get to figuring that here my work takes as much brains as theirs, and is as tough and dangerous as theirs, but they're taking in big money and I'm working for coffee and doughnuts. That kind of stuff gets you; anyway, it got me.

"Then I run into this Ethel and she goes for me like a house afire. I like her, too, so that's dandy; but one night she tells me about this husband of hers and how much dough he's got and how nuts he is about her and how he's still trying to find her, and I get to thinking. I think she's nuts enough about me to marry me. I still think she'd marry me if she didn't know I killed him. Divorcing him's no good, because the chances are she wouldn't take any money from him and, anyway, it would only be part. So I got to thinking about suppose he died and left her the roll.

"That was more like it. I ran down to Philly a couple of afternoons and looked him up and everything looked fine. He didn't even have anybody else close enough to leave more than a little of his dough to. So I did it. Not right away; I took my time working out the details, meanwhile writing to her through a fellow in Detroit.

"And then I did it. I sent those circulars out — to a lot of places — not wanting to point too much at this one. And when I was ready I phoned him, telling him if he'd come to the Deerwood Hotel that night, sometime between then and the next night, he'd hear from Ethel. And, like I thought, he'd've fallen for any trap that was baited with her. You picking him up at the station was a break. If you hadn't, I'd've had to discover he was registered at the hotel that night. Anyway, I'd've killed him and pretty soon I'd've started drinking or something and you'd've fired me and I'd've gone off and married Ethel and her half-million under my Detroit name." He made the sour mouth again. "Only I guess I'm not as sharp as I thought."

"Maybe you are," I said, "but that doesn't always help. Old man Kamsley, Ben's father, used to have a saying, 'To a sharp knife comes a tough steak.' I'm sorry you did it, Wally. I always liked you."

He smiled wearily. "I know you did," he said. "I was counting on that."

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*John Dickson Carr did not intend his title to have a double implication. Yes, there's a "parlor" in his story, and a "spider" and a "fly." But in another meaning altogether, Mr. Carr himself is the "spider" — and he asks you, the "fly," to venture into his story, the "parlor."*

*If you accept the invitation, we caution you: Beware! Mr. Carr's "parlor" is a web of silky traps. If you're not careful — extra-careful — you'll be caught by a whopping surprise before you can extricate yourself from Mr. Carr's crafty clutches.*

*This is another of John Dickson Carr's radio stories as broadcast by CBS under the title "Suspense." CBS warned its listeners that here is a tale "compounded of mystery, suspicion, and dangerous adventure . . . calculated to stir your nerves . . . to offer a precarious situation and then withhold the solution until the last possible moment." If ever one of those programs fulfilled all those promises, this was the one!*

# WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR?

*by JOHN DICKSON CARR*

NARRATOR: Just how far does any man trust his wife? Or his fiancée either, for that matter? . . . An English bazaar — a garden-party in the grounds of Layton Hall, in Kent, one fine summer afternoon before the war. Layton Hall is the home of Major and Mrs. Grant, always ready in the cause of charity. There's the stern red brick of the Hall, rising above oak trees. Against green lawns are the stalls and the swings and the roundabouts and the cocoanut-shies. They are not well patronized now, because a summer storm is coming up, and the wind is whipping at the tents.

But over in a far corner is the fortune teller's tent, gaudy in purple and gold yet with more than just a suggestion of mystery. Beside it is the miniature shooting gallery, presided over by Major Grant himself. The wind is starting to rise and it seems that only two of the spectators are oblivious to the coming storm . . . for they are in love. The young man is tall, in sport coat and flannels; the young lady in a flowing gown and of a startling beauty that suggests a halo — a startling beauty that glows against the gray of the lawn and the paint of the tents. She has her hand on his arm — for protection. Against what, you ask? Nothing — just for protection.

## SCENE ONE

MARY: I do so want to get my fortune told before we leave.

PHILIP: But Mary, the wind, and I'm sure it's going to pour any moment.



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MARY: It won't take long. We'll beat the storm — wait and see. Phil, I hate to drag you away from the match. But I do so want to get my fortune told!

(PHILIP LESTER *is thirty-odd, easy-going and casual, but clearly very fond of her*)

PHILIP: You don't believe in that rubbish, do you, Mary?

MARY: No. I suppose I don't, really. But I never can resist getting my fortune told. And they say this man is awfully good. They say it's marvellous how he can tell you all about yourself.

PHILIP: But you know that already.

MARY: (*Coaxing*) Phil, darling! Please don't be so unimaginative!

PHILIP: All right. I'll be good. Who *is* the fortune-teller, by the way?

MARY: There's his sign on the tent. The Great Omar. Palmist and crystal-gazer. Sees all, knows all!

PHILIP: I mean, who is he in real life? He can't be anyone from the village, or we'd all know he's a fake.

MARY: Probably Major Grant could tell us. There's the Major now. But . . .

(MAJOR GRANT *is gruff, jovial, and elderly*)

GRANT: (*Calling*) Hallo, there! You two! Over here!

MARY: (*Troubled*) Please, Phil. We don't . . . we don't *have* to go there, do we?

PHILIP: Go where?

MARY: To that shooting-range. I *hate* guns!

PHILIP: (*Puzzled*) But it's right next to the fortune-teller's tent, Mary. And we can't insult our host. (*Calling*) Coming, Major!

MARY: Look at the Major! He's beaming all over his face, and twisting that white moustache into a corkscrew. (*Hesitates*) I suppose he's heard? — about us?

PHILIP: Mary! My very contrary one! You're not ashamed of being engaged to me, are you?

MARY: (*Injured*) You *know* it's nothing like that, Phil! I'm much too *much* in love with you. Only — the old cats in the village are probably saying dreadful things about me.

PHILIP: But what the devil *could* they be saying?

GRANT: Mary Sherwood! Phil Lester!

MARY: Hello, Major Grant.

GRANT: (*Expansively*) You young rascals! Give me a hand, each of you; and many congratulations!

PHILIP: Thanks, Major. We feel rather pleased about it ourselves. Or at least *I* do.

GRANT: And you, young woman! You come here for only six months. You turn the head of every man in the village. You wind up by capturing our largest landowner and make all the fond mothers foam at the mouth. Damme, my girl, how do you do it? Are you a demon in disguise?

(*A faint noise of rising wind, with flapping of canvas, which continues and grows louder*)

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PHILIP: (*Amused*) It's a ruddy *good* disguise, if she is.

MARY: Please, Major Grant! Please, Phil!

GRANT: (*Perplexed*) Is anything wrong?

MARY: No, nothing. But — it's getting dark, and the wind's rising. I think it's going to rain.

PHIL: And a moment before you were the one who said not to worry.

GRANT: *That* won't matter, my girl. The show's nearly over anyway.

MARY: We came up here, really, to see the fortune-teller. If you wouldn't mind —

GRANT: (*Mock-serious*) No you don't, my girl! Not a bit of it! Not until you've patronized *this* charity. As a preparation to polishing off your husband after marriage, why not try a few rounds with a rifle? Eh?

MARY: No! Please!

GRANT: Now here's a neat little model. Winchester 61. Twenty-two calibre. Try it!

MARY: I know it's stupid and silly of me. And it's not the rifle, really. It's — it's anything to do with — death.

PHILIP: With death?

MARY: I mean, anything that suggests death. Ever since I was a child, I've never even been able to look at a dead person in a coffin. It scares me.

PHILIP: But nobody's going to get killed, darling! Just blaze away and see if you can hit that target.

MARY: (*Helplessly*) All right. If you insist. (*She takes rifle and fires.*)

GRANT: Watch out!

PHILIP: You've hit the electric light in the roof. You're not supposed to aim at that.

GRANT: Look here! Speaking of death ——

PHILIP: Yes, Major Grant?

GRANT: If that's her style of target-shooting, damme, if I'm not going to crawl out from under this counter and stand *behind* her. Make way!

MARY: (*Tensely*) Here's the rifle, Phil. I'm sorry, I can't go on with this.

PHILIP: (*Uneasily*) I'm sorry too, Mary. If I'd known it was going to affect you like this —

GRANT: You run along and see the fortune-teller, my dear. He'll only admit one at a time.

PHILIP: Yes, go ahead. I'll wait for you. (*Pause*) You know, Major, I *am* a blasted idiot for upsetting her!

GRANT: You're a very lucky idiot, young fellow. I hope you realize it.

PHILIP: I realize it, right enough. And I hope this fortune-teller doesn't take very long.

GRANT: Eh? Why?

PHILIP: The sky's getting as black as pitch. And, if you're not careful, this wind is going to blow all your tents into the next county.

GRANT: These tents are pretty securely pegged, young fellow. I think we can risk it.

PHILIP: It's so dark. Look there!

GRANT: Where?

PHILIP: At the fortune-teller's tent. He's got a light inside, and you can see his shadow against the tent. There's Mary going in — she's sit-

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ting down across the table from him —

GRANT: (*Confidentially*) I say, young fellow! Do you happen to know who the fortune-teller is?

PHILIP: No. I was going to ask you.

GRANT: (*Chuckles*) I'll tell you a little secret. He's a detective-inspector from Scotland Yard.

PHILIP: A — *what?*

GRANT: A detective-inspector from Scotland Yard. He came down here on business; forged half-crowns, or something. So the Chief Constable and I asked him to be our fortune-teller. He's one of these glittering-eye blokes. And in a turban, with brown paint on his face.—

PHILIP: Does he know anything about palmistry?

GRANT: No. But he knows a lot about human nature. That, my lad, is Inspector Brandon. He's a specialist in poison cases. They say he never forgets a face.

PHILIP: (*Sharply*) Wait a minute!

GRANT: Anything wrong?

PHILIP: What's he saying to Mary? Look at the shadows!

(*A heavier gust of wind, and flapping canvas*)

GRANT: Confound this wind.

PHILIP: (*Intently*) It's like watching a shadow play against a screen. Mary's jumped up and backed away from him. He's pointing his finger at her. Now she's backing out of the tent. Look, Major, he's following her! Can you hear what he's saying?

BRANDON: (*Off*) Remember, my dear, ashes to ashes and dust to dust . . .

MARY: No! No!

BRANDON: Ashes to ashes and dust to dust . . .

SCENE TWO

PHILIP: Mary, control yourself. You shouldn't get all upset over that fortune-telling lingo. What's wrong? What was he saying to you?

MARY: Saying to me? Nothing at all, really. Only the usual thing about a happy life, and a little illness, but nothing serious.

PHILIP: Then why were you so frightened?

MARY: But I wasn't frightened!

PHILIP: I'm sorry, dear. I saw your shadow on the wall of the tent and you were shrieking: "No! No!" I think I'll go in and get *my* fortune told. See what this is all about —

MARY: Phil, you mustn't!

PHILIP: But why not?

MARY: (*Desperately*) I — I felt a drop of rain on my head. It's going to *pour* in a second! Hadn't we better run for the house?

PHILIP: You go on up to the house, Mary. I want to see this very curious fortune-teller.

MARY: Phil! Please!

(*Heavy rain blots out the noise of the wind*)

SCENE THREE

PHILIP: I say! Fortune teller! May I come in?

(INSPECTOR BRANDON *has a deep, mysterious voice*)

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BRANDON: You may. Please enter.

PHILIP: Thank you.

BRANDON: Sit down in the chair opposite me. First tell me the date of your birth. Then look at the crystal on the table in front of you.

PHILIP: Excuse me, Inspector Brandon. Do you mind if we drop the mumbo-jumbo?

BRANDON: (*Relaxing*) As a matter of fact, I'd like to drop it. It's been a bit of a strain, talking like Hamlet's ghost. (*Laughs*) What's on your mind.

PHILIP: Maybe only my nerves. But — what were you saying to Miss Sherwood?

BRANDON: Miss who?

PHILIP: The young lady who was just in here! My fiancée — What's wrong? Why do you jump like that?

BRANDON: Did you say — fiancée?

PHILIP: Yes, of course. What's wrong?

BRANDON: Look here, Mr.—?

PHILIP: My name is Philip Lester.

BRANDON: And what did you say *her* name is?

PHILIP: Mary Sherwood. What's all this mystery?

BRANDON: Tell me, Mr. Lester. Has she lived here in the village for very long?

PHILIP: No. Only about six months.

BRANDON: And how long have you been engaged to her? (*Sharply*) Believe me, I have a reason for asking that.

PHILIP: It'll be a week tomorrow. But —

BRANDON: A week tomorrow! Has she by any chance invited you to dinner at her house tomorrow night?

PHILIP: I — I —

BRANDON: (*Fiercely*) *Has she?*

PHILIP: (*Still more bewildered*) Yes.

BRANDON: Do you know who this "Mary Sherwood" really is? No? Well, I'll tell you! She is —

(*A rifle shot.* BRANDON *cries out*)

PHILIP: Inspector Brandon!

BRANDON: (*Gasping*) Never . . . stand . . . with your shadow . . . against a light.

PHILIP: You're hit! Watch the table! (*Crash of falling table and thud of body*)

MARY: (*Off*) Major Grant, I'm terribly sorry! But Phil *shouldn't* have given me this dreadful rifle to hold! All I did was touch the trigger by accident. (*Innocently*) I — I do hope I haven't hit anything.

### SCENE FOUR

NARRATOR: Later, that same night, after the *unfortunate* accident that *couldn't* be helped: A rather white-faced young man slips down the road, pauses in front of the door to the Inn, starts to enter and then changes his mind. He looks over his shoulder and then walks around the building, being careful to stay within its shadow. He slips in through the side door and makes sure that no one sees him as he makes his way quietly up the stairs to a darkened passageway outside the bedrooms. He glances at the number on the

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first door, hurries down the hall, and stops in front of room 27.

(*Knocking at door*)

BRANDON: (*Weakly*) Yes? Come in? (*Door opens.*)

PHILIP: (*Amazed*) Good lord, Inspector Brandon! I thought —

BRANDON: Close that door! (*Door closes.*)

PHILIP: But — you're sitting up in bed!

BRANDON: *And* taking nourishment, thank you.

PHILIP: I heard you were still unconscious, and not expected to live.

BRANDON: Yes. That was the report I asked Dr. Styles to give out.

PHILIP: But why?

BRANDON: I had my reasons, Mr. Lester. As you can see I was the unfortunate recipient of a flesh wound across the left shoulder. It bled a little, but not much.

PHILIP: Look here, Inspector! Poor Mary is nearly frantic. She thinks she's killed you. Let me ring her up, and —

BRANDON: (*Sharply*) Stay away from that telephone!

PHILIP: But why?

BRANDON: Because I want to tell you a few things about Miss Mary Sherwood. In the first place, she isn't a "miss." She's had three husbands.

PHILIP: *What?*

BRANDON: All of whom died a violent death — by *poisoning*. Now just one moment, before you lose your temper. Three husbands; and one fiancé whom she didn't bother to marry. First the fiancé. They made mutual wills in each other's favor. Exactly a week after the engagement, following dinner at her house, this fellow was taken ill. He died before morning in tetanic convulsions.

PHILIP: I tell you, it's impossible! *That* little girl?

BRANDON: That little girl, as you call her, is forty-two years old.

PHILIP: I don't believe it!

BRANDON: Don't take *my* word for it. I've sent Sergeant Lambert to London for the file. You can see photographs, and fingerprints.

PHILIP: I still don't believe it!

BRANDON: Then tell me, Mr. Lester. You're a wealthy man, aren't you?

PHILIP: (*Dazed*) I'm fairly well off, yes.

BRANDON: Have you and this woman made wills in each other's favor?

PHILIP: Mary wouldn't need to do that! She's got plenty of money, and a collection of jewels worth I don't know how much!

BRANDON: I quite agree. But you haven't answered my question. Have you made wills in each other's favor?

PHILIP: (*Reluctantly*) Well — yes.

BRANDON: Whose suggestion was that? Yours or hers?

PHILIP: I don't remember! We started talking, and agreed it would be a sensible idea.

BRANDON: But it shocked you a little, didn't it? You wondered why it was necessary?

PHILIP: Inspector, listen! Let me ge-

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out of this nightmare for just one second! A minute ago you were talking about photographs and fingerprints.

BRANDON: Well?

PHILIP: You don't mean she's been . . . on trial?

BRANDON: She has been on trial . . . three times. (*Sharply*) Yes, three times! Under three different names.

PHILIP: (*Quickly*) But she was acquitted?

BRANDON: Yes! Because each time she had a cast-iron alibi.

PHILIP: (*Triumphantly*) Ah! You see!

BRANDON: Wait! She was acquitted simply because the prosecution couldn't show *how* the poison was administered. I tell you, they were miracle murders! I first saw her when she called herself "Jane Jordan." It was in Courtroom Number One at the Old Bailey. I can remember that scene as though it were yesterday. Yes, even down to the last detail of her clothes. Oh, she was a clever one. Wore black, but not severe. The kind of black that shows a woman off at her best without your even knowing that she's making an impression. I can see the Judge, with the Sword of State on the wall behind him, and *that* woman speaking out from the dock. *Speaking* did I say? She *pleaded* as no actress has ever done before, and in such a sweet tone. She told the court that she didn't want to go into the witness-box and testify because they'd "trip her up" and "make her say horrible things that weren't true."

PHILIP: But witnesses . . . She must have had witnesses —

BRANDON: A *cook* . . . a *butler* . . . a *maid*. And she proved that they prepared and served every bit of food and drink that they had that night; and she even proved that the butler was in the room the entire time they were eating. The only thing that she admitted was that the victim — her fiancé — died in her house. But she swore by everything holy that she was innocent.

PHILIP: But Mr. Brandon, how *was* the poison administered?

BRANDON: Ah — *that*, my boy, is what we could never find out. In all my years with the force I have never seen anything so fiendishly clever. From the start of the murder right through the trial. (*Pause*) Are you listening, Mr. Lester?

PHILIP: I'm listening, but look here, Inspector, if the jury knew she'd been up for murder twice before —

BRANDON: The jury couldn't know that.

PHILIP: Couldn't know that? What do you mean?

BRANDON: Our British law rules that no previous offense can be introduced as evidence, or as much as mentioned. She used different names each time. Nobody spotted her as the same woman.

PHILIP: Except the police?

BRANDON: Except the police, who were powerless. And that woman

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has been getting away with murder for more than nine years!

PHILIP: Did she — have the same set of servants each time?

BRANDON: No. A different set. So the servants were obviously innocent.

PHILIP: Then *how* did she do it?

BRANDON: Exactly! How?

PHILIP: Did you ever — trace any poison to her?

BRANDON: No. It's true she always had an *elaborate* wall-safe in her bedroom —

PHILIP: There's a wall-safe in the house she's got now, but it's not elaborate. In fact it's so simple that the combination of the safe opens to the letters of her own name.

BRANDON: (*Sharply*) Did you ever see inside it?

PHILIP: Once or twice. But how the devil could I recognize poison if I saw it?

BRANDON: Poison can be a white powder or a colorless liquid.

PHILIP: I tell you, the whole thing's fantastic! I'm going to ring up Mary, and ask her point-blank —

BRANDON: There's the telephone. I can't stop you. But I'd hoped you'd help me with a little experiment.

PHILIP: Experiment?

BRANDON: Nobody knows I'm able to get up. If I could be hidden somewhere — say upstairs in her bedroom — and watch her in action when she tries to poison you tomorrow night. . . . (*Telephone rings.*)

BRANDON: *You'd* better answer it. I'm supposed to be dying.

PHILIP: Look here, Inspector. I'm not going through with it! Suppose there's been a mix-up in identities? Suppose it's somebody who only *looks* like Mary? There might be a mistake!

BRANDON: The fingerprints will prove that. Answer the phone!

PHILIP: (*Lifts phone*) Hello?

MARY: (*On phone*) Phil Lester! Is that *you?*

PHILIP: *Mary!*

BRANDON: (*Whispering*) Put your hand over the mouthpiece of the phone!

PHILIP: (*Whispering*) Well?

BRANDON: The game's in your hands now. You can either give the show away — or you can help trap a murderess.

PHILIP: (*Desperately*) Suppose there *has* been a mistake?

BRANDON: Suppose there *hasn't?*

PHILIP: Blast you, I'm going to marry her!

BRANDON: Even if she *is* a poisoner?

MARY: Phil, what on earth are you mumbling about? I can't hear you.

PHILIP: It's nothing, Mary! It was only —

MARY: Listen, Phil. I've been talking to Major Grant and the Chief Constable. They say I'll not get into any trouble over that dreadful shooting business; because, darling, it *really was an accident.*

PHILIP: Of course.

MARY: But they also say that fortune-teller was really a detective from Scotland Yard. Did you know that?

PHILIP: Yes, Mary. I know it.

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MARY: I *thought* I'd seen him somewhere before. It was . . . it was at one of the trials, I expect.

PHILIP: (*Hoarsely*) What trials?

MARY: I'll explain all about it tomorrow night, darling. You *are* coming to dinner, aren't you?

BRANDON: (*Grimly*) Well, Mr. Lester?

MARY: But what I really wanted to ask was how *is* the poor man? He's not really going to die, is he?

BRANDON: Make your choice, Mr. Lester.

PHILIP: He's . . . he's . . . I mean . . .

MARY: Speak up, Phil! I can't hear!

PHILIP: Just a second, Mary. (*To* BRANDON) I don't know *what* to do.

BRANDON: If I have a chance to watch her, I may be able to see how she works that poisoning trick. If not, you can die in tetanic convulsions and still think how "sweet" she is. I'd give a year's pay to land that lady in the condemned cell; and, by all that's holy, it depends on you! What do you say?

PHILIP: All right. (*In phone*) Hello, Mary. Yes, I'll be over for dinner.

## SCENE FIVE

NARRATOR: It's the next evening and the storm has completely blown over. An ideal summer evening. A time for open windows and iced drinks and light meals. The home of Miss Mary Sherwood is cool and pleasant under the oak trees. The kind of home, combined with the soft summer breeze, that is liable to lull a man into a feeling of false security. A modern house staffed with a *butler* . . . a *cook* . . . and a *maid!* French windows from the lawn open into a long drawing-room. There are two persons sitting in that drawing room — two persons watching the twilight deepen into night — a man and a young woman indulging in that quaint old English custom of a cocktail before dinner . . . but only the man is drinking!

MARY: (*Dreamily*) Isn't it lovely and peaceful here, Phil?

PHILIP: (*Edgily*) Yes. Very pleasant.

MARY: As though you might go to sleep, and never wake up again. (*Gently*) Phil, darling! What *is* the matter?

PHILIP: Matter? There's nothing the matter!

MARY: Please don't try to fool me. You've been looking like — I don't know what!

PHILIP: It's only the weather, Mary.

MARY: Shall I ring for Wilkins, and ask him to bring you another gin-sling?

PHILIP: No, thanks. One is enough.

MARY: I did so hope you'd have an appetite for dinner tonight. I've got something rather special prepared for you.

PHILIP: (*Quickly*) What is it?

MARY: You'll see — when you've tasted it. (*Laughs*) Are you sure you won't have another drink?

PHILIP: No, Mary. (*Nerves shaking*) For the love of heaven, stop nagging!

MARY: I'm sorry, Phil.

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PHILIP: (*Contritely*) I'm sorry, too. But if you must know, I was just — thinking.

MARY: About what?

PHILIP: Oh, about you. And what might be going on in that brain of yours. And what you'd been doing in all the years before we met.

MARY: Not so *many* years, my dear. I'm not exactly an old hag.

PHILIP: No, of course not! But —

MARY: But I told you over the phone, didn't I, that I had a sort of confession to make?

PHILIP: What sort of — confession?

MARY: When we were with Major Grant, before that accident with the rifle, I said I couldn't bear to think about death. The real reason is that I've always been so fascinated by it.

PHILIP: Fascinated?

MARY: By death. And the pain of death. And the ways you might commit murder and get away with it.

MARY: Listen! Did you hear anything?

PHILIP: What?

MARY: You know, Phil, I could have sworn I heard somebody moving about in the front bedroom upstairs.

PHILIP: There's nobody here except ourselves and the servants.

MARY: Then why are you looking at me like that?

PHILIP: Like what?

MARY: Is it because you think I'm morbid? Maybe I am. Maybe I've got reason to be.

PHILIP: Mary, wait! If you've got anything to tell me —

MARY: Let me go on. Did you ever hear of a murderess called Jane Jordan?

PHILIP: Mary, wait! Don't say anything more! There's a —

MARY: (*Unheeding*) It was an interesting case, darling. The defense proved that she didn't prepare, or touch, or as much as *go near* any of the things her victim ate or drank.

PHILIP: And was that true?

MARY: Perfectly true.

PHILIP: Then she *didn't* kill him!

MARY: Oh, yes, she did.

PHILIP: Mary, let's turn on the lights! It's getting so dark in here that —

MARY: We won't turn on the lights, Phil. Because I don't want you to see my face. You see, the idea that's been occurring to me for weeks . . . (*Starts to laugh*) . . . is that I could kill you just as she killed *her* victim.

PHILIP: Kill me?

MARY: I think the police were rather stupid. They forgot that her house was a modern house, like this one.

PHILIP: A modern house? What's that got to do with it?

MARY: They forgot the electric refrigerator. And the ice-cubes.

PHILIP: (*Frantically*) Are you telling me that — ?

MARY: You can get poison as a colorless liquid, pour it into a drawer of ice-cubes, and let the water freeze. Offer your victim a bitter drink like a *gin-sling* to conceal the taste of the poison. Somebody else prepares the drink; so they all swear

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you never came near it and couldn't have poisoned it. You can always get rid of the glass afterwards. Isn't it easy?

PHILIP: Brandon! Inspector Brandon!

MARY: Don't shout, Philip.

PHILIP: (*Savagely*) Listen to me, Mary. Did you, or didn't you, put poison in my drink?

MARY: You don't understand the poisoner's mind, Phil. It's not like any other form of killing. It's a drug and a mania and a poison in itself. You get away with it once. Then you've got to do it again and again.

PHILIP: Did you or didn't you?

MARY: (*As though she didn't hear*) It gives you the power over life and death. You're like an empress who can blast and blind and slave. . . . All right. What if I *had* poisoned the drink.

PHILIP: Brandon! Where are you!

BRANDON: Hello, there. I was on the steps. I wanted to wait till she'd finished.

PHILIP: Did you hear?

BRANDON: Yes. Every word.

MARY: But I thought — I thought —

BRANDON: That I was dying. That you had "accidentally" shot the only man who would never rest until he had caught up with you?

MARY: What are you talking about?

BRANDON: That same act.

PHILIP: I don't care what she's done. I'll swear I took it voluntarily!

BRANDON: Come along, my dear. There's a comfortable cell waiting.

MARY: Philip! What's he. talking about? Philip, don't let him come near me!

BRANDON: Touching, isn't it, Mr. Lester? But then, of course, you've never seen it before while I've had the pleasure three times.

MARY: What's he talking about? Answer me, Philip, answer me!

PHILIP: I . . . I . . .

BRANDON: We're wasting time. Come along.

MARY: (*Defiant*) You won't take me anywhere! Philip, please!

BRANDON: Pleading won't help you this time.

(*Sound of police whistle*)

GRANT: (*Off*) There's not a moment to lose, men. Hurry up!

MARY: (*Terrified*) That sounded like a police whistle.

BRANDON: I'm afraid it is, my dear.

GRANT: Just a moment, please! Everyone stay where you are!

PHILIP: (*Defeated*) Hello, Major Grant.

GRANT: (*Gruffly*) Evening, young fellow.

PHILIP: I suppose *you* know, too.

GRANT: Yes, and it's about time. Had me fooled long enough. I'm representing the Chief Constable, who's been detained in Maidstone. This man with me is Sergeant Blake, of the Kent Constabulary.

PHILIP: But it won't do you a bit of good, Major.

GRANT: I'm sorry, young fellow; but the Sergeant's got an unpleasant duty to perform. He holds a warrant for the arrest of . . .

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PHILIP: You can't make that arrest, Major!

GRANT: No? And why not?

BRANDON: I'm very much afraid he can, Mr. Lester.

GRANT: You're blamed well *right*, I can.

PHILIP: But I'll swear I took the poison voluntarily. She's been acquitted on the other charges, and you haven't got a thing against her.

GRANT: Do you feel all right, Philip? And what in the blazes are you talking about?

PHILIP: I'm talking about Mary Sherwood.

BRANDON: But he isn't. Are you, Major?

GRANT: Of course not. I'm talking about you. Going around calling yourself Inspector Brandon.

BRANDON: It might have worked if the young lady hadn't been such a rotten shot.

GRANT: That's right. Then we'd have never contacted Scotland Yard.

BRANDON: A pity that such a brilliant career as mine has to end so abruptly.

PHILIP: Say, who the devil are you, anyway?

GRANT: Him? He's a jewel thief.

BRANDON: Oh, come, come, Major. Say, rather, a fancier of other people's collections.

MARY: My jewels!

BRANDON: In my inside coat pocket.

PHILIP: But how?

BRANDON: You were kind enough to offer me the room as a hiding place and you supplied the combination of the safe to me in my hotel room.

GRANT: His specialty is to come into a community, pick out a wealthy family, tell a few lies. . . .

BRANDON: *Artistic* lies, Major.

GRANT: Artistic lies . . . so that he gains your confidence and steals the best jewelry without even having to open a window. I don't know what string of whoppers he's been telling *you* . . .

MARY: But I think *I* know. Phil, you idiot! You don't believe *I'm* the notorious Jane Jordan, do you?

PHILIP: You mean this drink . . . wasn't poisoned?

MARY: Of course it wasn't! I was talking about heredity!

PHILIP: Heredity?

MARY: When a thing like that is in your family — in your own flesh and blood — don't you see how it can make you morbid and nearly drive you mad? Don't you understand why I had to tell you, and get it off my conscience at last? I wasn't talking about myself! I was talking about my older sister, who died in Canada two years ago!

BRANDON: That's right, Phil, my boy. Every word of it. Investigated it myself. Spent three months getting all the information — and look at me. That's the kind of business this is—— I haven't even a *bracelet* to show for my pains.

(*Click of handcuffs*)

BRANDON: I beg your pardon. I spoke too quickly about bracelets. It seems I have a *pair* of them. Coming, Major?

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*Damon Runyon fashioned a new way of telling a story. Heywood Broun once wrote: "He has caught with a high degree of insight the actual tone and phrase of the gangsters and racketeers of the town." And E. C. Bentley, author of* TRENT'S LAST CASE, *once edited a volume of Runyon's Bagdad-on-the-Hudson bombshells, selected especially for English readers who, it is recorded, went quietly mad about them.*

*The Runyon guys and dolls are a choice collection of cheap chiselers, cherubic cheaters, chippie chasers, and cheesecake chewers — or to put it another way, they include Broadway banditti, metropolitan mobsters, Gotham gunmen, and Times Square thugs. Some of the stories are poignant tales of crime, always leavened by the unique Runyonesque humor. Only rarely did the great interpreter of The Main Stem cast his yarns in straight detective-story technique.*

*Here is one of those exceptions, featuring amateur detective Ambrose Hammer, the "newspaper scribe" and a "pretty slick guy."*

*"What, No Butler?" (the very title is a tip-off on what to expect!) is admittedly not one of Mr. Runyon's classic stories. But it is Broadway bloodhounding* à la Damon *and it offers readers, in the fourth from the last paragraph, one of the oddest clues ever put on paper by which a detective "comes to suspect" the solution of a murder mystery.*

# WHAT, NO BUTLER?

*by DAMON RUNYON*

TO LOOK at Ambrose Hammer, the newspaper scribe, you will never suspect that he has sense enough to pound sand in a rat hole, but Ambrose is really a pretty slick guy. In fact, Ambrose is a great hand for thinking, and the way I find this out makes quite a story.

It begins about seven o'clock one May morning when I am standing at the corner of Fiftieth Street and Broadway, and along comes Ambrose with his neck all tied up as if he has a sore throat, and he gives me a large hello in a hoarse tone of voice.

Then we stand there together, speaking of the beautiful sunrise, and one thing and another, and of how we wish we have jobs that will let us enjoy the daylight more, although personally I do not have any job to begin with, and if there is one thing I hate and despise it is the daylight, and the chances are this goes for Ambrose, too.

In fact, in all the years I know Ambrose, I never catch him out in the daylight more than two or three times, and then it is when we are both on our way home and happen to meet up as we do this morning I am talking about. And always Ambrose is telling me what a tough life he leads, and how his nerves are all shot to pieces, although I hear the only time Ambrose's nerves really bother him is once when he goes to Florida for a vacation, and has a nervous break-



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down from the quiet that is around and about those parts.

This Ambrose Hammer is a short, chubby guy, with big, round, googly eyes, and a very innocent expression, and in fact it is this innocent expression that causes many guys to put Ambrose away as slightly dumb, because it does not seem possible that a guy who is around Broadway as long as Ambrose can look so innocent unless he is dumb.

He is what is called a dramatic critic by trade, and his job is to write pieces for the paper about the new plays that somebody is always producing on Broadway, and Ambrose's pieces are very interesting, indeed, as he loves to heave the old harpoon into actors if they do not act to suit him, and as it will take a combination of Katherine Cornell, Jimmy Durante and Lillian Gish to really suit Ambrose, he is generally in there harpooning away.

Well, while we are standing on the corner boosting the daylight, who comes along but a plain-clothes copper by the name of Marty Kerle, and he stops to give us a big good-morning. Personally, I have no use for coppers, even if they are in plain clothes, but I believe in being courteous to them at all times, so I give Marty a big good-morning right back at him, and ask him what he is doing out and about at such an hour.

"Why," Marty says, "some doll who claims she is housekeeper for Mr. Justin Veezee just telephones the station that she finds Mr. Justin Veezee looking as if he is very dead in his house over here in West Fifty-sixth Street, and I am going there to investigate this rumor. Maybe," Marty says, "you will wish to come along with me."

"Mr. Justin Veezee?" Ambrose Hammer says. "Why, my goodness gracious, this cannot be true, because I hear he is in the Club Soudan only a few hours ago watching the Arabian acrobatic dancer turn flip-flops, and one thing and another, although personally," Ambrose says, "I do not think she is any more Arabian than Miss Ethel Barrymore."

But of course if Mr. Justin Veezee is dead, it is a nice item of news for Ambrose Hammer to telephone in to his paper, so he tells Marty he will be delighted to go with him, for one, and I decide to go too, as I will rather be looking at a dead guy than at guys hurrying to work at such an hour.

Furthermore, I am secretly hoping that the housekeeper does not make any mistake, as I can think of nothing nicer than seeing Mr. Justin Veezee dead, unless maybe it is two or three Mr. Justin Veezees dead, for personally I consider Mr. Justin Veezee nothing but an old stinker.

In fact, everybody in this town considers Mr. Justin Veezee nothing but an old stinker, because for many years he is along Broadway, in and out, and up and down, and always he is on the grab for young dolls such as work in night clubs and shows, and especially young dolls who do not have brains enough to realize that Mr. Justin Veezee is nothing but an

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old stinker. And of course there is always a fresh crop of such dolls coming to Broadway every year, and in fact it is getting so nowadays that there are several crops per year.

But although it is well known to one and all that Mr. Justin Veezee is nothing but an old stinker, nobody ever dasts speak of this matter out loud, as Mr. Justin Veezee has plenty of potatoes, which come down to him from his papa, and it is considered very disrespectful along Broadway to speak of a guy with plenty of potatoes as an old stinker, even if he is as tight with his potatoes as Mr. Justin Veezee, which is very, very, very tight, indeed.

Now, the house in West Fifty-sixth Street where Mr. Justin Veezee lives is between Fifth and Sixth avenues, and is once the private home of the Veezee family when there is quite a raft of Veezees around, but it seems that these Veezees all die off one by one, except Mr. Justin Veezee, and so he finally turns the old home into an apartment house.

It is a very nice-looking building, maybe four or five stories high, with apartments on each floor, and Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment is on the first floor above the street, and takes in the whole floor, although this does not mean so much space at that, as the house is very narrow.

It is one of these apartment houses where you push a button at the front door on the street floor, and this push rings a bell in the apartment you are after, and then somebody in the apartment pushes a button up there, and this unlocks the front door, and you walk up the stairs to where you are going, as there is no elevator.

Well, anyway, it is in the front room of Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment that we see Mr. Justin Veezee himself. He is sitting straight up in a big easy-chair beside a table on which there is a stack of these pictures called etchings, and he has on evening clothes, and his eyes are wide open and bugging out of his head, as if he is totally amazed at something he sees, and the chances are he is, at that.

There is no doubt whatever but that Mr. Justin Veezee is very dead, indeed, and Marty Kerle says we are not to touch anything until the medical examiner has a peek, although by the time he says this, Ambrose Hammer is looking the etchings over with great interest, as Ambrose is such a guy as dearly loves to look at art works.

The housekeeper who calls up the station is present when we arrive, but she turns out to be nothing but an old tomato by the name of Mrs. Swanson, who does not live in Mr. Justin Veezee's house, but who comes every morning at an early hour to clean up the joint. And this Mrs. Swanson states that she finds Mr. Justin Veezee just as he is when she comes in on this particular morning, although she says that usually he is in the hay pounding his ear at such an hour.

She thinks maybe he falls asleep in the chair, and tries to roust him out, but as Mr. Justin Veezee does not say aye, yes, or no, she figures the chances are he is dead, and so she gives the

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gendarmes a buzz.

"Well," I say to Ambrose Hammer, "this is a most ghastly scene, indeed. In fact, Mr. Justin Veezee looks worse dead than he does alive, which I will never consider possible. The chances are this guy dies of old age. He must be fifty, if he is a day," I say.

"No," Ambrose says, "he does not die of old age. The way I look at it, this is a case of homicide. Somebody gets in here and cools off Mr. Justin Veezee, and it is a very dirty trick if you ask me, because," Ambrose says, "they do not give Mr. Justin Veezee a chance to change into something more comfortable than a dinner jacket."

Well, Ambrose says he will look around and see if he can locate any clues, and while he is snooping around the joint in comes a guy from the medical examiner's office and takes a gander at Mr. Justin Veezee. And the guy states at once that Mr. Justin Veezee is positively dead, although nobody is giving him any argument on this point, and he further states that what kills Mr. Justin Veezee is nothing but a broken neck.

Right away this broken neck becomes a very great mystery, because it does not stand to reason that a guy can break his own neck sitting down, unless maybe he is practicing to be a contortionist, and nobody figures it possible that Mr. Justin Veezee is practicing to be a contortionist.

Furthermore, the medical guy finds certain marks on Mr. Justin Veezee's neck which he claims show that somebody grabs Mr. Justin Veezee by the guzzle and cracks his neck for him as if he is nothing but a goose, and the medical guy says it must be somebody with very strong dukes to play such a prank on Mr. Justin Veezee.

Well, Ambrose Hammer seems to be all heated up about this whole matter, although personally I cannot see where it is any of his put-in. The way I look at it, Mr. Justin Veezee is no price any way you take him when he is alive and kicking, and his death does not change the betting any as far as I am concerned, because I know from the things I see of Mr. Justin Veezee, and the things I hear of him, that he is still an old stinker, in spades.

Ambrose tells me that he is certainly going to solve this mystery in the interests of justice, and I tell him that the only way to solve a murder mystery is to suspect everybody in town, beginning with the old tomato who discovers the remains of Mr. Justin Veezee, and winding up with the gendarmes who investigate the case.

"But," I say to Ambrose Hammer, "you do not pin the foul deed on any of these parties, but on the butler, because this is the way these things are done in all the murder-mystery movies and plays I ever see, and also in all the murder-mystery books I ever read."

Well, at this Marty Kerle, the plain-clothes copper, states that the only trouble with my idea is that there is no butler connected with Mr. Justin Veezee's establishment in any way, shape, manner, or form, and when I tell Ambrose that maybe we

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can hire a butler to double in murder for us, Ambrose becomes very indignant, and speaks to me as follows:

"No butler commits this murder," Ambrose says, "and, furthermore, I do not consider your remarks in good taste, no matter if you are joking, or what. I am convinced that this crime is the work of nobody but a doll, because of certain clues I encounter in my survey of the premises."

But Ambrose will not tell me what these clues are, and personally I do not care, because the way I look at it, even if some doll does give Mr. Justin Veezee the business, it is only retribution for what Mr. Justin Veezee does to other dolls in his time.

Well, the scragging of Mr. Justin Veezee is a very great sensation, and the newspapers make quite a lot of it, because there is no doubt but what it is the greatest mystery in this town in several weeks. Furthermore, anybody that ever as much as speaks to Mr. Justin Veezee in the past twenty years becomes very sorry for it when the newspapers commence printing their names and pictures, and especially any dolls who have any truck with Mr. Justin Veezee in the past, for naturally the newspaper scribes and the gendarmes are around asking them where they are at such and such an hour on such and such a date, and it is quite amazing how few guys and dolls can remember this offhand.

As near as anybody can find out, the last party to see Mr. Justin Veezee alive the morning he is scragged is a red-headed doll at the Club Soudan by the name of Sorrel-top, and who is by no means a bad-looking doll, if you like them red-headed. This Sorrel-top is in charge of the check-room where one and all are supposed to check their hats and coats on entering the Club Soudan, and to tip Sorrel-top a shilling or two when they go out for keeping cases on these articles.

It seems that Sorrel-top always remembers when Mr. Justin Veezee leaves the Club Soudan, because he never stakes her to as much as a thin dime when he calls for his kady, and naturally Sorrel-top is bound to remember such a guy, especially as he is the only guy in the United States of America who dasts pass up Sorrel-top in this manner.

So she remembers that Mr. Justin Veezee leaves the Club Soudan on the morning in question around three bells, and the chances are he walks home, as none of the taxi jockeys who hang out in front of the Club Soudan remember seeing him, and, anyway, it is only a few blocks from the club to Mr. Justin Veezee's house, and it is a cinch he is never going to pay money to ride in a taxi just a few blocks.

Now it comes out that there are only two entrances to Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment, and one entrance is the front door, but the other entrance is a back door, but the back door is locked and barred on the inside when Mr. Justin Veezee is found, while the front door is locked with a patent snap lock, and Mrs. Swanson, the old tomato who does the housekeeping for Mr. Justin Veezee, states that she and

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Mr. Justin Veezee have the only two keys in the world to this lock that she knows of, although of course the parties who live in the other apartments in the house have keys to the street door, and so has the old tomato.

Furthermore, the windows of Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment are all locked on the inside, and there seems to be no way whatever that anybody except Mr. Justin Veezee and the old tomato can get in this apartment, and the gendarmes begin looking at the old tomato very suspiciously, indeed, until she digs up a milkman by the name of Schmalz, who sees her going into the apartment house about six-thirty in the morning, and then sees her a few minutes later come tearing out of the joint yelling watch, murder, police, and the medical guys say there is no chance she can guzzle Mr. Justin Veezee in this time, unless she is a faster worker than anybody they ever hear of in all their days.

Anyway, nobody can figure a motive for the old tomato to guzzle Mr. Justin Veezee, although a couple of the newspaper scribes try to make out that maybe she is an ever-loving sweetheart of Mr. Justin Veezee in the long ago, and that he does her dirt. Personally, I consider this proposition reasonable enough, because it is a sure thing that if the old tomato is ever Mr. Justin Veezee's sweetheart, he is just naturally bound to do her dirt. But the old tomato seems so depressed over losing a customer for her housekeeping that finally nobody pays any more attention to her, and one and all go looking around for someone else who may have a motive for giving Mr. Justin Veezee the business.

Well, it comes out that there are a large number of parties, including both male and female, in this part of the country who figure to have a motive for giving Mr. Justin Veezee the business, but they are all able to prove they are some place else when this matter comes off, so the mystery keeps getting more mysterious by the minute, especially as the gendarmes say there is no chance that robbery is the motive, because Mr. Justin Veezee has all his jewelry on him and plenty of potatoes in his pockets when he is found.

Furthermore, they find no fingerprints around and about, except some that turn out to belong to Ambrose Hammer, and at that Ambrose has a tough time explaining that he makes these fingerprints after Mr. Justin Veezee is found, and not before. They find most of Ambrose's fingerprints on the etchings, and personally I am glad I am not around fingering anything while I am in the joint, as the gendarmes may not listen to my explanations as easy as they listen to Ambrose.

Well, I do not see Ambrose for several nights, but it seems that this is because there are some shows opening around town and Ambrose is busy harpooning the actors. Finally one night he comes looking for me, and he states that as I am with him when he starts working on the mystery of who gives Mr. Justin Veezee the business, it is only fair that I be present when

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he exposes the party who commits this dastardly deed. And, Ambrose says, the hour now arrives, and although I do my best to show Ambrose that there can be no percentage for him in hollering copper on anybody in this matter, nothing will do but I must go with him.

And where does he take me but to the Club Soudan, and as it is early in the evening there are very few customers in the joint when we arrive, as the Club Soudan does not heat up good until along about midnight. Furthermore, I judge that the customers are strangers in the city, as they seem to be partaking of food, and nobody who is not a stranger in the city will think of partaking of food in the Club Soudan.

Well, Ambrose and I get to talking to a character by the name of Flat-wheel Walter, who has a small piece of the joint, and who is called by this name because he walks with a gimp on one side, and by and by Ambrose asks for the Arabian acrobatic dancer, and Flat-wheel says she is at this time in her dressing-room making up for her dance. So Ambrose takes me up a flight of stairs to a little room, and sure enough, there is this Arabian acrobatic dancer making up.

And the way she is making up is by taking off her clothes, because it seems that an Arabian acrobatic dancer cannot dance with anything on except maybe a veil or two, and personally I am somewhat embarrassed by the spectacle of a doll taking off her clothes to make up, especially an Arabian. But Ambrose Hammer does not seem to mind, as he is greatly calloused to such scenes because of his experience with the modern stage, and, anyway, the Arabian manages to get a few veils around her before I can really find any grounds for complaint. But I wish to say that I am greatly surprised when I hear this Arabian dancer speak in very good English, and in fact with a Brooklyn accent, and as follows:

"Oh, Ambrose," she says, "I am so glad to see you again."

With this she makes out as if to put her arms around Ambrose Hammer, but then she remembers just in time that if she does this she will have to let go her hold of the veils and, anyway, Ambrose pulls away from her and stands looking at her with a very strange expression on his kisser.

Well, I will say one thing for Ambrose Hammer, and this is that he is at all times very gentlemanly, and he introduces me to the Arabian acrobatic dancer, and I notice that he speaks of her as Miss Cleghorn, although I remember that they bill her in lights in front of the Club Soudan as Illah-Illah, which is maybe her first name.

Now Ambrose gazes at Miss Cleghorn most severely, and then he speaks:

"The game is up," Ambrose says. "If you wish to confess to me and this party, well and good, otherwise you will tell your story to the gendarmes. I know you kill Mr. Justin Veezee, and," Ambrose says, "while you may

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have an excellent excuse, it is against the law."

Well, at this Miss Cleghorn turns very pale, indeed, and begins trembling so she almost forgets to hold on to her veils, and then she sits down in a chair and breathes so hard you will think she just finishes a tough tenth round. Naturally, I am somewhat surprised by Ambrose's statement, because up to this time I am not figuring Miss Cleghorn as such a doll as will harm a flea, although of course I will never lay a price against this proposition on any doll without having something of a line on her.

"Yes," Ambrose says, speaking very severely, indeed, to Miss Cleghorn, "you make an appointment to go to Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment the other morning after you get through with your Arabian acrobatic dancing here, to look at his etchings. I am surprised you fall for etchings, but I am glad you do, at that, because it gives me my first clue. No guy is hauling out etchings at four o'clock in the morning to look at them by himself," Ambrose says. "It is one of the oldest build-ups of a doll in the world.

"Well," Ambrose goes on, "you look at Mr. Justin Veezee's etchings. They are very bad. In fact, they are terrible. But never mind this. Presently you struggle. You are very strong on account of your Arabian acrobatic dancing. Yes," Ambrose says, "you are very, very, very strong. In this struggle you break Mr. Justin Veezee's neck, and now he is extremely dead. It is all very sad."

Now, I wish to state that I am greatly mortified at being present at this scene, because if I know what Ambrose Hammer says he knows about Miss Cleghorn, I will keep my trap closed, especially as there is no reward offered for any information leading to the apprehension of the party who gives Mr. Justin Veezee the business, but Ambrose is undoubtedly a very law-abiding guy, and the chances are he feels he is only doing his duty in this matter, and, furthermore, he may get a nice item for his paper out of it.

But when he tells Miss Cleghorn that she is guilty of this unladylike conduct toward Mr. Justin Veezee, she gets up out of her chair, still holding onto her veils, and speaks to Ambrose Hammer like this:

"No, Ambrose," she says, "you are wrong. I do not kill Mr. Justin Veezee. I admit I go to his apartment, but not to see his etchings. I go there to have a bite to eat with him, because Mr. Justin Veezee swears to me that his housekeeper will be present, and I do not know he is deceiving me until after I arrive there. Mr. Justin Veezee gets out his etchings later when he can think of nothing else. But even Mr. Justin Veezee is not so old-fashioned as to believe any doll will go to his apartment just to look at etchings nowadays. I admit we struggle, but," Miss Cleghorn says, "I do not kill him."

"Well," Ambrose says, "if you do not think Mr. Justin Veezee is dead, a dollar will win you a trip around the

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world."

"Yes," Miss Cleghorn says, "I know he is dead. He is dead when I leave the apartment. I am very, very sorry for this, but I tell you again I do not kill him."

"Well," Ambrose says, "then who does kill Mr. Justin Veezee?"

"This I will never, never tell," Miss Cleghorn says.

Now, naturally, Ambrose Hammer becomes very indignant at this statement, and he tells Miss Cleghorn that if she will not tell him she will have to tell the gendarmes, and she starts in to cry like I do not know what, when all of a sudden the door of the dressing-room opens, and in comes a big, stout-built, middle-aged-looking guy, who does not seem any too well dressed, and who speaks as follows:

"Pardon the intrusion, gentlemen," the guy says, "but I am waiting in the next room and cannot help overhearing your conversation. I am waiting there because Miss Cleghorn is going to draw enough money off her employers to get me out of this part of the country. My name," the guy says, "is Riggsby. I am the party who kills Mr. Justin Veezee."

Well, naturally Ambrose Hammer is greatly surprised by these remarks, and so am I, but before either of us can express ourselves, the guy goes on like this:

"I am a roomer in the humble home of Mrs. Swanson in Ninth Avenue," he says. "I learn all about Mr. Justin Veezee from her. I sneak her key to the street door of Mr. Justin Veezee's house, and her key to the door of Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment one day and get copies of them made, and put the originals back before she misses them. I am hiding in Mr. Justin Veezee's apartment the other morning waiting to stick him up.

"Well," the guy says, "Mr. Justin Veezee comes in alone, and I am just about to step out on him and tell him to get them up, when in comes Miss Cleghorn, although of course I do not know at the time who she is. I can hear everything they say, and I see at once from their conversation that Miss Cleghorn is there under false pretenses. She finally wishes to leave, and Mr. Justin Veezee attacks her. She fights valiantly, and in just a straight-away hand-to-hand struggle, I will relish a small bet on her against Mr. Justin Veezee, or any other guy. But Mr. Justin Veezee picks up a bronze statuette and is about to bean her with it, so," the middle-aged guy says, "I step into it.

"Well," he says, "I guess maybe I am a little rougher with Mr. Justin Veezee than I mean to be, because I find myself putting a nice flying-mare hold on him and hurling him across the room. I fear the fall injures him severely. Anyway, when I pick him up he seems to be dead. So I sit him up in a chair, and take a bath towel and wipe out any chance of fingerprints around and about, and then escort Miss Cleghorn to her home.

"I do not intend to kill Mr. Justin Veezee," the middle-aged-looking guy says. "I only intend to rob him, and I

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am very sorry he is no longer with us, especially as I cannot now return and carry out my original plan. But," he says, "I cannot bear to see you hand Miss Cleghorn over to the law, although I hope and trust she will never be so foolish as to go visiting the apartments of such characters again."

"Yes," Ambrose Hammer says to Miss Cleghorn, "why do you go there in the first place?"

Well, at this Miss Cleghorn begins crying harder than ever, and between sobs she states to Ambrose Hammer as follows:

"Oh, Ambrose," she says, "it is because I love you so. You do not come around to see me for several nights, and I accept Mr. Justin Veezee's invitation hoping you will hear of it, and become jealous."

So of course there is nothing for Ambrose Hammer to do but take her in his arms and start whispering to her in such terms as guys are bound to whisper under these circumstances, and I motion the middle-aged-looking guy to go outside, as I consider this scene far too sacred for a stranger to witness.

Then about this time, Miss Cleghorn gets a call to go downstairs and do a little Arabian acrobatic dancing for the customers of the Club Soudan, and so she leaves us without ever once forgetting in all this excitement to keep a hold on her veils, although I am watching at all times to remind her in case her memory fails her.

And then I ask Ambrose Hammer something that is bothering me no little, and this is how he comes to suspect in the first place that Miss Cleghorn may know something about the scragging of Mr. Justin Veezee, even allowing that the etchings give him a clue that a doll is present when the scragging comes off. And I especially wish to know how he can ever figure Miss Cleghorn even as much as an outside chance of scragging Mr. Justin Veezee in such a manner as to break his neck.

"Why," Ambrose Hammer says, "I will gladly tell you about this, but only in strict confidence. The last time I see Miss Cleghorn up to tonight is the night I invite her to my own apartment to look at etchings, and they are better etchings than Mr. Justin Veezee shows her, at that. And," Ambrose says, "maybe you remember I am around with my neck tied up for a week."

Well, the middle-aged-looking guy is waiting for us outside the Club Soudan when we come out, and Ambrose Hammer stakes him to half a C and tells him to go as far as he can on this, and I shake hands with him, and wish him luck, and as he is turning to go, I say to him like this:

"By the way, Mr. Riggsby," I say, "what is your regular occupation, anyway, if I am not too nosey?"

"Oh," he says, "until the depression comes on, I am for years rated one of the most efficient persons in my line in this town. In fact, I have many references to prove it. Yes," he says, "I am considered an exceptionally high-class butler."

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*In our last issue we brought you S. J. Perelman's "Farewell, My Lovely Appetizer" — a satire of the modern hardboiled detective story, with special emphasis on the work of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. In memorable fashion Mr. Perelman mimicked the "toughies" of contemporary crime fiction.*

*Now, in equally memorable fashion, Ben Hecht parodies another school of modern detective writing — the romantic-feminine school, the "Had-I-But-Known" super-slick women's-magazine detective-serial. Mr. Perelman did it to the "toughies" — Mr. Hecht does it to the "softies."*

*Here is another gorgeous spoof that for all its well-intentioned fun-poking is also a blistering satire. Mr. Hecht reads hundreds of detective and mystery stories — for diversion, as he says in the Author's Note below — and apparently some of them, without too much stretch of the imagination, seem to read like Chapter One of* THE WHISTLING CORPSE.

*Further comments at the end of the story . . .*

# THE WHISTLING CORPSE

*by BEN HECHT*

(AUTHOR'S NOTE: I am indebted to the writers of mystery books for many hours of diversion. In part payment of this debt I offer them this Chapter One, gratis and unencumbered, to use as a beginning for any of their subsequent works.)

*Dedication*

To Maybell, Gladys, Hortense, Marianne, Mathilda, Tinee, Ginger, Ethyl, Gussykins, Helena, Chickie, Bernice, Fifi, Dorothea, Gugu, Greta, My Wife and Mom, without whose love and tender understanding and jolly evenings at Grapes End this book would never have been written.

*Author's Note*

(The characters in this book bear no resemblance to anyone living or dead with the exception, of course, of Colonel Sparks and the charming Eulalia. I have used their red barn as a scene for two of the murders but Marroway Hall is entirely fictional and, as everyone knows, there is no such state in the U.S.A. as Bonita.)

## CHAPTER ONE

I SHALL never forget the bright summer afternoon when poor Stuffy found the green button under Grandma Marnoy's knitting bag — on the lawn out there, a stone's throw from Indian Creek that bisects the rolling Marpleton grounds where Toppet, Ruby and I used to play



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pirate and chase butterflies. I have often wondered what would have happened if Stuffy had given me the button instead of swallowing it. For one thing, Consuela Marston would never have met the man with the pick ax and I would never, of course, have gone to that dreadful carnival which was the beginning of everything.

Had I known, of course, even after the button, what seems so obvious to us all now — I mean, about Uncle Massie's love for that curious creature during his mining days in Texas when he founded the great Micheljohn fortune — I might have prevented some of the disasters which for a time threatened to wipe out the descendants of Nathaniel Colby. But poor Madelaine had always misunderstood Percival Massie's reasons for selling the great coffee warehouses that had been in the family — even before Jebby was born.

Percival loved Madelaine — in his own way, of course — arrogant, thin lipped and even sneeringly. But it *was* love as we all were to discover when the green button came home to roost and poor Stuffy was no more. That afternoon of the autopsy still brings a chill into my bones. Poor Stuffy! How can I ever blot out the memory of his bewildered face when the dead rose up and whistled at him — that whistle that changed Marroway Hall into a charnel house!

The events are still too fresh in my mind for me to write without a shudder as I recall that summer afternoon when Loppy and Coppy, Grandma Marnoy's favorite twins, arrived on the 3:18 at Maskincott, in answer to her imperial summons. Marroway Hall was never so festive as on that moment when these two ill-fated youngsters came laughing down the baronial staircase that led from Cousin Marshall's secret laboratory — as we were to find out — straight into the old Colonial living room that had once been a fort — the fort where the British had massacred the last of the Green Mountain boys on that Sunday hundreds of years ago before Bonita had yet become a state.

As children we used to be proud of the bloodstains over the mantelpiece which neither old Jebby nor any of the staff was allowed to efface. Little did we think that those bloodstains would someday become the clue that would put a rope around the necks of three people we all loved.

But, to return to the Green Button and poor Stuffy's untimely gourmandizing, I knew, of course, on that afternoon that Jennifer and Siegfried Mersmer had left two sons at the time of their tragic death in the south of France, although Delmar had disappeared when he was twelve and Happy (as we called him) had inherited the entire Marvin fortune, including the great stables of Marvingrovia. Word of Delmar's marriage to the ill-fated Agatha had been brought to us much later by Uncle Mooney when he returned with faithful Jebby after settling his affairs in the Transvaal. It was much too late for any of us

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to do anything, and I'm afraid we did just that — nothing. We all knew, of course, that the young wife had died in childbirth and that the twins Loppy and Coppy belonged to a previous marriage. But none of us — with the exception, of course, of the dead man who whistled through those awful nights — had any inkling of Uncle Morehead's last will and testament. But I am getting ahead of my story a wee bit.

It all really begins with the finding of the green button. We were all sitting on the veranda, the Countess Marsley, Spike Hummer, catcher for the Giants, and Uncle Murchison's two nephews — Milton and the irrepressible Pliny. And Grandma Marnoy was knitting away, laughing and agile despite her hundred and two years. And poor ill-fated Cousin Mullineaux was poring over his famous stamp collection. We sat sipping those adorable juleps that only old Jebby knew how to make and listening to Joel, the wittiest and yet cruellest man I have ever known, describe his recent trip to Charlestown.

I detected a curious tightening of Aunt Molby's eyelids as Joel talked and, despite the languorous mood of that moment, I felt a number of undercurrents. Jerry's hatred of the lovely Marianne and Uncle Milford's twenty years of silent rage against the woman who had left him for that impecunious art student — poor Jon Mungo whose lovely portrait of Senorita X hangs before me even now as I write — these were some of the undercurrents. There were others that I was to learn of later.

But we were all gay and frightfully witty as we sat there, listening to the chatter of the twins and watching Stuffy playing pirate on the lawn by himself. Suddenly something green flashed in the Bonita sun. I remember hearing a sharp intake of breath behind me, as if someone were stifling a gasp of terror. And then the flash of green was gone. The green button had disappeared down Stuffy's throat.

I turned, wondering who had gasped, and looked into the blazing eyes of Cousin Maynard — lank, easy going Maynard with his patrician nose and the ne'er-do-well droop to his sensual mouth. A knowing chuckle came from Grandma Marnoy's esoteric face! And then we were all chatting gayly again. All but Madelaine.

Poor Loppy! Maynard's love for her is something that still brings a glow to me as I recall him whittling that first boomerang — the one we found later at the bottom of Indian Creek, covered with her blood. It lies before me on my desk as I write, together with the green button, the cross-bow, the little torn laundry list, the pile of empty envelopes, and the old-fashioned fireless cooker that were all to open our eyes before that awful summer in Bonita was over.

I have always had a distaste for family reunions — and despite my interest in Grandma Marnoy's declaration that she had decided to change her will, I felt bored. Which may explain why I was the first to

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leave the veranda and why it was I, of all people, who first saw the daintily shod pair of feet dangling over the baronial staircase. For a moment I was too overcome to scream! A woman, still beautiful, still voluptuous, hanging in our ancient living room! I stared in horror at the lovely dead face now contorted in agony. And I had barely time to realize that this dangling corpse was whistling — whistling an old French-Canadian nursery song — *Arouet, ma' jollie Arouet* — before the room turned black and I felt myself plunging into an abyss.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

*Who will carry the lampoon?*

*Mr. Perelman has been "rough and tough" with the hardboiled writers; Mr. Hecht has "had-I-but-knowned" with the softboiled writers. Who will parody the other types of modern crime fictioneers?*

*We invite a spoof on the super-deductive intricate-puzzle type; on the out-and-out thriller; on secret-service-and-international-intrigue; on any species or variety of the genus detective story — and don't spare the Editor!*

"O"

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*James Yaffe's last appearance in EQMM — "Cul de Sac" in the issue of March 1945 — created a furore. And for good reason. Young Mr. Yaffe pulled a colossal "boner" — a classic, one for the books, the detective-story boner of the year; and your Editor was, definitely and indefensibly, an accessory before (and after) the fact for having permitted the blunder to slip through.*

*Neither of us — author or editor — knew a simple, fundamental fact in physics; and this lack of basic knowledge (known to most high school students!) invalidated the entire solution of "Cul de Sac." You'll recall that Sinclair-Cummings, the villain of the story, found himself bottled up in a dead-end alley. It was dusk and two policemen, blocking the only exit (and entrance), were about to pounce on Mr. Hyphen. The cul-de-sac was lined on three sides by warehouses, whose five-storey walls were solid brick without any windows. Mr. Hyphen had on his person a vital piece of paper which, if found by the police, would land him in clink for the best years of his life.*

*Mr. Hyphen's problem was to make that piece of paper vanish. He couldn't afford to have it found anywhere in the alley, anywhere in his clothes, anywhere on his body; seizure of that evidence by the policemen would stop permanently Mr. Hyphen's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of his own peculiar brand of happiness. Now, Mr. Hyphen also had on his person a toy balloon, purchased that day for his darling little daughter. Quickly, before the two policemen could collar him, Mr. Hyphen inflated the balloon, attached the damaging document to it with a piece of string, and let go. According to young Yaffe "atmospheric pressure did the rest" — the balloon rose, up and up, over five storeys, and into Never-Never Land.*

*And there the real tragedy occurred. A balloon inflated with human breath will not rise above the ground — a lesson in adolescent aeronautics that neither Yaffe nor your Editor is ever likely to forget. To rise, the balloon had to be filled with some lighter-than-air gas — and as many readers pointed out, Mr. Hyphen had no invisible containers of helium concealed in his pockets.*

*When the balloon in "Cul de Sac" disappeared into thin air, young Mr. Yaffe (with the negative assistance of your Editor) broke the laws of physics; in one fell flight of fancy the story split at the seams, burst, and disintegrated, leaving no trace of credible plot visible to the human eye.*

*The letters informing your Editor of this demonstrable affront to science began as a trickle, swelled with each visit of the postman, until finally — a deluge. Most readers who took pen in hand were very considerate of Yaffe's youth and your Editor's ignorance. Some were not quite so considerate — they complained, gloated, used strong language, and otherwise forgot the*



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*golden rule. For surely we all make mistakes at one time or another, and only he that is without error among you, let him first cast a stone. But the great majority of you were kind and tolerant, and we offer our sincere thanks for your loyalty and forbearance. The few others, we hope, have cooled down by this time, realizing that mistakes happen in the best of magazines — and we do mean the best of magazines.*

*But through thin and thick, as the letters from readers mounted to flood level, young Yaffe continued to remain our favorite boy-author. We do not lose faith easily — indeed, we do not lose faith ever.*

*What we did was to sit down and write to young Jimmy. Write another story, we said — write the blankety-blank best story you ever wrote. Write it quickly, and send it in, and let EQMM publish it, and let's show 'em!*

*Readers, what is the hallmark of a champion? In prizefighting a champion is the fighter who, clipped on the button and down for a count of nine, rises groggily to his feet — and still wins. No, he's even more than that: a real champion staggers to his feet and almost knocked out himself, proceeds to knock out the other fellow!*

*Readers, here is James Yaffe's new story, and when you read it, you'll be seeing young Jimmy rising from the canvas — a true champion with a fighting heart and words that sing. Our editorial chips are still on this amazing boy — he can take it and he can dish it out!*

# THE PROBLEM OF THE EMPEROR'S MUSHROOMS

*by JAMES YAFFE*

". . . In the midst of these distractions, Agrippina thought she had an opportunity to execute the black design which she had long since harbored in her breast, to kill the Emperor Claudius, her husband. Instruments of guilt were ready at her beck, but the choice of the poison was still to be considered; if quick and sudden in its operation, the treachery would be manifest; a slow corrosive would bring on a lingering death. In that case, the danger was that the conspiracy might in the interval be detected. . . . She resolved, therefore, to try a compound of new and exquisite ingredients, such as would make directly to the brain, yet not bring on immediate dissolution. . . . We are told by the writers of that day that a palatable dish of mushrooms was the vehicle of the poison. . . ."

— Tacitus, *The Annals*, Book XII



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PAUL DAWN leaned back in the comfortable easy chair with a sigh of new and exquisite relaxation. After two weeks of intense work — until he had finally discovered how the ingenious Mrs. Cranfield was able to kill her artist protégé without disturbing the locked doors of his studio — the chief, and only member of the Homicide Squad's Department of Impossible Crimes was in the right mood for sloth. And in these peaceful surroundings — Professor Bottle's living room — he thought he could enjoy it. He sipped his coffee with the air of a contented pussycat lapping up its evening milk, while his gray-haired friend in the opposite chair looked on with satisfaction, and then, after a moment, broke the silence.

"How would you like to solve an impossible murder — ?" he began, but got no further.

Paul Dawn winced. "Oh, my God! Not *you*, Professor! Haven't I enough trouble with that middle-aged bloodhound, Inspector Fledge?"

Frederick A. Bottle, Professor of Ancient History, smiled soothingly. "Believe me, Paul, I don't mean to disturb your present state of pleased paralysis. The impossible crime to which I refer can be investigated in the cozy comfort of this living room. It happens, you see, to be approximately two thousand years old."

Paul glared for a moment, his cup of coffee raised to his lips. "Don't you suppose the scent has become rather — cold by this time?" He finished the coffee in a gulp.

Bottle laughed. "Oh, rather. I don't expect you really to solve this affair, you know. Just thought you might be interested in it as a challenge. It's all about a dish of deadly mushrooms."

"Mushrooms! Professor, you're supposed to be an historian, not a chef."

"And so I am. Indeed, these mushrooms have roused the curiosity of a great many historians. They were the cause of at least one death and possibly more; they started one of the most despicable figures of human history on his career; they mark the direct beginning of the dissolution of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, they are the leading actors in what, so far as I know, is the only authentic impossible crime of historical significance."

Paul Dawn lit a cigarette and deftly produced a smoke ring. "Tell me about your Latin mushrooms," he said.

Frederick Bottle leaned forward and with a voice that managed to be dramatic without loss of restraint, began his story. "The Emperor Claudius, who died in the year 54 B.C., was a pompous, stupid man with too much power. He was the sort of ruler who, in his blundering naïveté, practically begged for assassination. . . ."

There was a knock on the living room door.

Something long and bony, wearing a thin face behind its spectacles, glowered sourly from the doorway. God, undecided whether to create a man or a woman, had somehow succeeded in creating neither. The creature in the

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doorway had a shape of sorts which only suggested femininity because it was draped in the conventional white uniform of a trained nurse; the creature had a voice which suggested a slamming door.

"Your wife is upset, Professor Bottle. She wants to see you right away."

Bottle sighed wearily. "I'm very busy. Tell Audrey I'll be up later this evening, Miss Poindexter."

"Your wife is not a well woman, Professor. She'll be all nerves tonight if you don't see her right now."

"Thank you, Miss Poindexter. That will do."

"I'll give her a sedative, then. But it won't calm her down." And so saying, Miss Poindexter turned abruptly and marched off.

"Audrey was always high-strung," Bottle said, getting up to shut the door. "But she's been much worse since her illness."

"I don't imagine the presence of that petrified Florence Nightingale would soothe anybody's nerves."

"Poindexter? I can't stand the woman myself, but Audrey seems to like her. And, of course, Poindexter does everything for her — dresses her, washes her, feeds her, even tastes all her food ahead of time to be sure it isn't too hot, or too salty, or something. But where was I?"

"The mushrooms of Emperor Claudius," Paul said. "An historical crossword puzzle which you have just challenged me to solve."

"Quite right." Bottle cleared his throat in his best professorial manner. "I explained to you already that Claudius was a weakling and a fool. There is an unflattering legend, dealing with his ascension to the Roman throne, that seems to substantiate this. According to this story, Claudius, who was living in the imperial palace at the time of the great purge in which the old ruler was killed, was found by the conspirators hiding behind the curtains in his mother's boudoir, and shivering for dear life. As luck would have it, the conspirators had just been worrying about whom to put on the throne now that the old emperor was dead; and here was Claudius, with the blood of emperors in his veins and not too many brains in his head; in short, the perfect puppet ruler. So they gave him the crown.

"Claudius ruled with a none too firm hand for more than a dozen years, mainly occupying himself with books of philosophy and food. When he became emperor, he had been married to a certain Messalina; she bored him, however, and he soon disposed of her — by offhandedly accusing her of adultery and having her publicly executed — and he remarried, this time with his own niece, the lovely and unscrupulous Agrippina."

"The study of Roman history," said Paul Dawn, "must play hell with a person's moral sense."

"It doesn't though," said Bottle. "Historians are really the most moral souls in the world. People like Claudius and Agrippina always seem so very far off — " And for a brief mo-

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ment there was something like a very far off look in the professor's eyes. "But I must get on with the story. Agrippina was a young woman of great ingenuity and even greater ambition. As an encouragement to her ambition, she had a son by a previous marriage, a perfectly despicable youth, but she adored him and hoped to make him emperor. The boy's name — perhaps you've heard of him — was Nero.

"You can see, of course, how the idea of murdering Claudius occurred quite naturally to Agrippina. Perhaps, in fact, she had intended to murder him from the moment she agreed to marry him. This, indeed, is what Tacitus believed, when he described the incident in his *Annals;* but Tacitus is always far more entertaining than accurate. Be that as it may, the idea of killing Claudius and placing Nero on the throne began with Agrippina and soon developed into an organized conspiracy, with an incalculable number of important personages involved in it. Roman conspiracies are really quite astonishing, Paul. Practically everybody at court always seems to know about them beforehand, including the emperor's closest advisers, his friends, his family, and sometimes the emperor himself.

"The rest of the story is simple and gruesome. In the traditional Roman manner, Agrippina decided to kill Claudius by the use of poison. She hesitated at first over what poison to use: it could not work too quickly, or she might betray herself; nor could it work too slowly — the emperor might save himself. She finally hit upon a happy medium, a kind of poison which, as we know from fairly reliable sources, was supposed to begin taking effect on the victim within thirty minutes, usually less, and kill within twenty-four hours."

Paul asked lazily, between smoke rings, "Do you know its name."

"Impossible to tell." Bottle shrugged. "It might be any number of concoctions. If only Tacitus had described the death of Claudius in more detail, we might perhaps be able to diagnose the poison from the symptoms. This is one of those countless historical mysteries that can never be solved."

"I wonder," Paul said softly. "But go ahead with the unpleasant details."

"It's all very horrible. A notorious dealer in poisons, a woman named Locusta, was hired by Agrippina to prepare the mixture. Locusta, an odious creature, evidently operated a thriving business in moderately-priced murder, for Tacitus, in writing of her, informs us that she was 'reserved among the instruments of state to serve the purposes of dark ambition.' The poison was then administered to Claudius in a dish of succulent mushrooms, one of his favorite foods. He ate heartily, and soon began to feel ill. Agrippina was nervous, however, as she watched his illness, and determined to finish him off immediately, instead of waiting the full twenty-four hours for his death. She called in the emperor's most trusted physician, Xenophon — who naturally was also

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involved in the plot. Pretending to help Claudius unload his stomach, Xenophon swabbed his throat with a feather, a common medical practice of the day. This feather, however, was dipped in a few drops of deadly poison. Claudius, already weak from the effects of the poisoned mushrooms, went into convulsions and died violently and almost instantly."

Paul Dawn nodded thoughtfully. "Pleasantly bloodthirsty," he said. "But I hardly understand why you mention it to me at all. There's no impossible crime involved in this."

"I'm not finished yet," said Bottle with an enigmatic smile. "I haven't told you about Halotus, the emperor's poison-taster."

"You interest me. Go on."

"The institution of the poison-taster was, as you may know, a common one among the Roman emperors and lords. Nearly every important Roman of the time lived constantly in fear of his life, and came to expect death from almost any source. Consequently, he kept by him at all times a poison-taster whose job it was to partake of small portions of all his food and drink before he did so himself. If there was any poison in the food, the taster would indicate its presence."

"And how would the taster indicate its presence?"

"By dying! The important citizen would then order a new meal."

"And, I trust, a new poison-taster."

"Correct. Claudius was perhaps the most nervous, most frightened, most suspicious of all the emperors. He kept his poison-taster near him every minute of the day. This taster was a man named Halotus, mentioned briefly by Tacitus, in *The Annals.* Other sources tell us a good deal about Claudius's dread of poison. His routine was something like this: before every meal, he would watch carefully as Halotus tasted all his food; then he always waited not a few minutes but exactly one hour before tasting any of it himself, with Halotus by his side every moment; finally, if Halotus felt no ill effects at the end of the hour, Claudius would eat freely."

"He didn't," Paul observed, "enjoy many hot meals that way."

"He didn't care. He was worried more about remaining alive to enjoy the cold ones. And that brings us directly to the impossible crime. When the poisoned mushrooms were served to Claudius, Halotus, his poison-taster, must have eaten a portion of them first. At the end of thirty minutes, he should have felt and looked quite ill; at the end of an hour, he should have looked even more ill. Why, then, did Claudius go ahead and eat those mushrooms, when quite obviously they had just poisoned his human guinea-pig? Or, to put it the other way around, *how was it possible that the same mushrooms which poisoned Claudius should have left his poison-taster completely unharmed?* The answer, of course, is that it's impossible, the first impossible murder in history. Well, Paul, two thousand years have passed since then, and it's about time somebody solved it!"

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Blissfully unconscious of poisoned Roman emperors and puzzled New York detectives, an aesthetic smoke ring floated dreamily towards the clouds. No shutters slammed, no hinges squeaked in Professor Frederick Bottle's living room, and no sinister storms raged wildly outside; and yet, this seemed to Paul Dawn's mind a perfect atmosphere for slamming shutters, squeaking hinges, and raging storms. He had developed a habit lately, which irritated him deeply, of transforming every setting that he encountered in real life into the kind of unreal, fairy-tale setting he might encounter in a detective story. And curiously, the more he concentrated on the emperor's magical mushrooms, the more he felt like a character of fiction. It was a damned nuisance.

"Murder," he said slowly, "is a cozy affair really, intimate, personal, and eminently social. Like the theatre or political democracy, murder can only flourish in a highly organized and closed society. That's why I feel uncomfortable trying to solve a murder at such a great distance."

"You'd like to be able to question the suspects, is that it? Study their reactions? Probe their characters?"

"Don't be absurd. I never study the reactions of my suspects; it's a fruitless and frustrating occupation. Suspects can have all sorts of reactions; they can turn reactions on and off like water in a faucet; they can look innocent, guilty, frightened, and calm with amazing versatility. No, I prefer contemporary murders, Professor, because having solved a case, I am always sure that I will be able to check my solution with the truth and find out whether or not I was right."

Bottle nodded his head knowingly. "You're vain, that's what! You don't like the idea of a case where there can be no glory and no gloating after it's all over. You're just annoyed because you won't be able to show the murderer how clever you've been!"

"That may be," Paul admitted. "On the other hand, perhaps I'll get the chance after all. But I want you to tell me more about the people involved in this ancient mystery. It is essential that I become more intimately acquainted with Claudius, Agrippina, Xenophon, and Halotus."

"Very well, then: the Emperor Claudius." Bottle waited for a moment, then began thoughtfully. "More than anything else, I think that Claudius resembled a nervous old woman. A hypochondriac, a coward, and a fop, he pampered himself excessively and spent more time on the comfort of his body than the care of his country. He was vain and stupid, but he also possessed to a great extent the single positive quality that seems to have characterized every one of the so-called 'bad emperors.' He was cruel. The story of his disposal of Messalina, his first wife, is not a pretty one; Tacitus makes it quite clear that Claudius, in spite of his personal squeamishness, had thrown his share of enemies to the lions."

"Hypochondriac, Professor? How can you be sure of that?"

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"I can't, of course. But it seems logical, doesn't it? Claudius was supposed to be a man of robust, sturdy proportions, stocky and well-fed and glowing with health; and yet, we constantly read about his weak nerves and his migraine headaches and his sudden illnesses, most of them brought on by the most trivial causes. What more probable than for him to be a hypochondriac? But let me tell you about his wife, for she was a much more forceful and admirable individual."

"Indeed? You admire the murderous Agrippina?"

"Yes, I do, in a way. She strikes me with a firm, powerful, masculine effect, a woman of great will and strength, of iron character and subtle intellect, despicable as she may have been according to all moral standards."

Paul Dawn made a face. "Personally, she revolts me. So do all deliberate killers."

"To be sure. Don't forget, though, that the Roman citizen was a great deal more tolerant of deliberate murder than we are today. He had to be, or else he would have gone about condemning ninety per cent of his friends and relations. In any event, the ingenuity of Agrippina's murder is enough to command the highest respect."

"Tell me more about Agrippina."

"What more can I tell? Assuming her to be a murderess, it is difficult to understand the dominant factor in her character: what was it that led her to kill her husband? Lust for power? A simple desire to rule the country through her son? Not very likely, for after all she ruled the country anyway, through Claudius. Was she prompted, then, by an extraordinary affection of mother for offspring? According to an old legend, Agrippina was warned by an oracle, before Nero's birth, that her son would grow up to become emperor and to kill his mother; and she was supposed to have answered that she didn't care what happened to her so long as her son became emperor. Then, of course, there's the possibility, which I rather fancy myself, that she killed Claudius because she couldn't stand living with him any longer. What do you think, Paul?"

"I think absolutely nothing. I feel, however, altogether too much."

"Not very lucid, are you? I'll tell you about Halotus, the poison-taster, and Xenophon, the physician."

"Unnecessary," said Paul Dawn, "I already know why Claudius died while his poison-taster remained alive. Your two-thousand-year-old mystery is solved. As a matter of fact," he continued, "it's more than solved."

Professor Bottle leaned forward eagerly. "How do you mean that?"

"There are two possible solutions," said Paul. "Both of them are equally plausible. Both of them are equally dramatic. Perhaps both of them are equally correct.

"The first solution hinges on the nature of the poison that was placed in the mushrooms; or rather, I should say, on the nature of the poison that was *not* placed in the mushrooms. But I ought to start at the beginning with the two all-important facts. You said

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that Claudius was a suspicious and frightened hypochondriac. You also made it clear that Claudius fell ill because of the mushrooms, but that he was actually killed, not by the poisoned mushrooms, but by the poisoned feather. Suppose you wanted to kill a suspicious hypochondriac with a poisoned feather, Professor: in what way could you convince your suspicious and frightened victim that he might safely allow you to stick that feather down his throat?"

"Impossible," said Bottle. "If he was very suspicious, he would never let me stick anything down his throat."

"Oh, yes, he would, Professor, if you took advantage of his hypochondria — if he believed, as Claudius was tricked into believing, *that he had already been poisoned and that your feather was the only means of saving his life!*

"Of course, you now understand what happened. The mushrooms were served to Claudius *without any poison in them at all.* Halotus tasted them in Claudius's presence; an hour passed, after which, since nothing had happened to his poison-taster, Claudius felt no qualms about eating the mushrooms himself. But as soon as he finished the last mushroom, Halotus must have suddenly begun to groan and writhe about and double up as if he had been poisoned. It was all an elaborate act, of course. Halotus had been bribed by Agrippina to pretend at the right moment that he was poisoned. The purpose? To make Claudius, who had just finished his mushrooms, believe that he too was poisoned! This was no difficult feat, since Claudius was a hypochondriac, and could easily be convinced of his own illness. And, once convinced that he too was dying, Claudius could also be convinced that the only cure would be for Xenophon to swab his throat with a feather. The impossible murder was thus made possible, Professor, by the very precautions with which Claudius hoped to prevent it."

Curiously enough, Professor Bottle hardly seemed elated. "That's all?" he asked. "That's how it was done?"

"That's one solution," said Paul Dawn. "But there's a second one. Are you sure you'd care to hear it?"

"Definitely. There may be great historical value in this."

"I doubt it." Paul sighed and shook his head almost sadly. "I am a plumber," he said, "and I want to commit a murder; I will probably kill my man with a water pipe. I am a carpenter, and I want to commit a murder; I will most likely knock out my victim's brains with a hammer. I am a detective-story writer, and I want to commit a murder; I will undoubtedly model it after one of my own plots. I am Paul Dawn, and I want to commit a murder; I will assuredly devise an impossible crime. Suppose, then, that I am a professor of ancient history, and I want to commit a murder. Will I not go back to ancient history for my inspiration?"

Professor Bottle tightened his grip on the arms of his chair. He said

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nothing, but he seemed to be trembling.

Paul Dawn went on in a calm, relentless voice. "The murder of Claudius is interesting, no doubt, but after all, there is so little information to be had on the subject, so little really reliable evidence, that to try and solve it at all seems a foolish waste of time. Why, then, did you go out of your way to ask my help in solving it? And why did you falsify and decorate the facts? Why such careful and detailed analysis of the characters of Claudius and Agrippina when there is nothing known for certain about the characters of Claudius and Agrippina?

Paul leaned forward and his voice grew louder. "A strange thing about Claudius and Agrippina — at least, about the two people that I met tonight under those names. What was Claudius? A nervous, suspicious, vain, and irritating hypochondriac — just like the woman in bed upstairs! And what was Agrippina? A brilliant, subtle, forceful, even heroic figure, wronged and persecuted, a justified killer — just like the man who sits across from me at this moment! There is no difference, no difference in the world — except that the sexes are switched around; and even then, there is no difference, for Claudius 'resembled a nervous old woman,' and Agrippina produced a 'firm, masculine effect.' And where, it may be asked, is Halotus, the poison-taster? Where else but upstairs, stern and unapproachable in a white nurse's uniform, tasting all of 'Claudius's' food ahead of time, 'to be sure it isn't too hot, or too salty, or something'?

"My God!" Paul cried, rising to his feet with sudden fury. "Did you invite me here tonight *to plan your wife's murder?*"

Bottle said nothing at first, but finally, "I'm sorry," in a low voice, "very sorry."

"And how useless it all was! You thought the two situations were parallel. You thought the solution to Agrippina's crime would give you the key to your own. But how helpless you are! They're not really the same at all. The old murder, the murder of Claudius, depended entirely on the role of Xenophon and his poisoned feather. But this is the twentieth century A.D.! How did you expect to use a poisoned feather?"

"I don't know what I expected. It was just an idea. It was stupid of me."

Suddenly Paul Dawn fell back in his chair and began to laugh. He laughed loud and long, and could hardly get out his words. "What did I tell you? What did I say about the historian's moral sense? Pour me a drink, Professor, something strong, and let's forget the whole thing!"

Bottle was still bewildered, still stunned. "I don't understand. Why are you so happy?"

"Am I happy? I was thinking how lucky I am to be a member of the Homicide Squad — a mild and moral profession, where we only meet the nicest people. . . ."

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*In 1941 The Vanguard Press published* A TASTE FOR HONEY, *by H. F. Heard. The secret of the book's chief character was cunningly kept — by the publishers, by the reviewers, and by the connoisseur-enthusiasts who praised the book so highly. Christopher Morley wrote: "What delight this tale holds for every true detective-story lover," and nominated the book as "the most enchanting crime story of 1941." Vincent Starrett called the book "the most original contribution to detective-story literature in many years."*

*What was the secret of Mr. Heard's character? Well, he was a detective named Mr. Mycroft; he was first met in beekeeping retirement; and although a certain name never once appeared in the book, it became increasingly certain that Mr. Heard had written a full-length pastiche of The Great Master Himself.*

*The following year, 1942, Mr. Heard brought forth another full-length adventure of Mr. Mycroft —* REPLY PAID. *Again the acclaim was thunderous. Christopher Morley put it brilliantly when he said that "for tastes that are Baker Street and Irregular, Mr. Heard's work is as good as Mrs. Hudson's curried kedgeree."*

*So your Editor, aware at last that the game was afoot, sat down and wrote to Mr. Heard. Why not a short story about Mr. Mycroft? Mr. Heard replied, in effect: Why not indeed? And one otherwise bleak and windy morning a large envelope arrived containing "The Adventure of Mr. Montalba, Obsequist."*

*Reader, you have in prospect an experience both rich and strange; for there are many remarkable features about this story. It is, if it pleases your fancy, a pastiche of He-Who-Cannot-Be-Named, with Mr. Mycroft playing the rôle of The One and Only to the hilt, and Mr. Sidney Silchester doubling for the muddleheaded medico. Or, if you prefer, you may ignore the "association" possibilities and accept "Mr. Montalba, Obsequist" as that rare type of crime story which combines pure detection with pure fantasy. The real and unreal are seldom compatible in a single short story: straight detection is usually earthbound, grounded by the realistic demands of cold logic and credibility; fantasy, on the other hand, has wings — it may soar into the stratosphere of the weird and even the supernatural. Does Mr. Heard successfully emulsify the oil-and-water of realism-and-fantasy, where so many before him have failed?*

*But perhaps the most remarkable facet of this story is Mr. Montalba himself — rather, what he stands for. Surely Mr. Montalba is the most amazing undertaker ever to appear in print — and his mortician's parlor the most stupendously grandiose ever imagined. Is it possible to be mordantly witty, mortiferously whimsical, about Death itself? Judge for yourself. Mr. Heard's curious and out-of-this-world approach is not for the squeamish; nor is his gruesome taxidermy for the queasy . . .*



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# THE ADVENTURE OF MR. MONTALBA, OBSEQUIST

*by H. F. HEARD*

I NERVOUSLY took a pinch at the bell-chain. From inside the house there answered a deep musical clang. "If you take a pinch they give you a knell," I tittered to myself. I always fall into puns when I'm nervous. I also always notice a number of irrelevant things — I noticed that the house was really in too good taste. The door was mahogany polished till it was like tortoise shell. Its rich tawnyness was framed in a beautiful mellow free-stone, Naples yellow in tone, obviously too perfect in grain ever to have come from a quarry: the façade rose in perfect proportions right up to a balustraded cornice where, against a powder-blue sky, stood at decent intervals elegant high-shouldered urns. "A gentleman who is really well-dressed," I quoted to myself, "always has on one thing that is old." The house was a brand-new piece of traditional art.

A sound made my eye come to earth. The door had opened. In it stood a man illustrating, better than the house, my remark. He was dressed in a morning suit made of the finest dove-grey worsted, a silver grey cravat at his neck, grey kid gloves on his hands. He had already remarked, "Please enter." I had done so and a colored servant in a maroon livery had "relieved me" of my hat and cane before I had my wits sufficiently about me to begin:

"I've come . . ."

"Only too pleased to show you," sheared off the body of my explanation and I found myself being ushered slowly down a long passage while, in contrast to our processional pace, a flood of the quickest and strangest "patter" I'd ever heard poured voluminously into my ears.

"This way to the Obsequarium."

"The *what*?"

"Ah, you don't know? *Le mot juste*, I think you must allow. It came to me in a moment, and with it I knew I could give *le coup de grace* to all competition. It's patented, of course — as is, naturally, the process. But what's a process without a name? Indeed, I believe that had I to choose to make my way with either the process or the name, I'd choose the name. Of course the process *is* fascinating to a technician and naturally one *has* the specialist's interest. But how could the public? They want a word and what is more they demand a *non*-descriptive word. Our profession is a key profession just because of that. We undertake" — the word was just a little raised — "to make possible for people to mention the unmentionable. There's where I saw my opportunity. The others were content to follow public taste or, if you will, *dis*-taste. I was the

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first to show that fashions could be made. If in finery, why not in funerals? The profession was clinging to the past. The black mourning tradition? What was all that but a confession of defeat — cover up everything, have the event at night, keep everything in the shadow. I was the first to say, 'We solicit the closest inspection. We take the public fully into our confidence.' Indeed the time was overdue for a break with tradition. Morticians! Funeral Homes!! I know they meant well. But you know to what place the way is paved with good intentions. They wanted people to face up to death and be soberly bright about it. But these good fellows were more than a little out of date. I saw that. There's now no need for the public to face up to death — at least, not to anyone else's. Aeternitas settled that! You didn't know about Aeternitas? Of course this *is* an age of specialization. Still Aeternitas did rather step over frontiers. It was a German invention. They used it, with considerable commercial success, at the big Berlin Zoo. How? 'Take an inmate home. Have a permanentized pet.' There they lay, curled up in solid sleep — cats, dogs, lion pups, rare apes. The Zoo casualty list had been capitalized — a loss turned into a profit. The dead paid for the living. More, there wasn't a limit to size — a beetle to an elephant, it was all the same. There wasn't any taxidermy trickery about it. No, what you got was a *real animal* — so real that if you chose to cut it right through, you'd find cross-sectioned every bit of it, every organ. That, I own, was what set my mind on it. You know all that romance about hearts kept in gold cases and vases. Well, of course, you could have a piece — excuse my anatomical expertism — a piece of gristle, but a heart — No. But with Aeternitas — why, I saw at once there was the real thing, shapely, the plump curves, and hard — well, not as stone but as a good plastic — stand up to any amount of handling and quite a moderate amount of not too bitter tears without even losing its gloss. But why stop at hearts — why not go straight for wholes? Who'd carry a heart about in a vase when they could have the departed entire, sitting at home! Grim? No grimmer than a photograph! Grimness, gruesomeness? All that, I do assure you, is *vieux jeu* — the *frisson* of an age which had to be *macabre faute de mieux*. Aeternitas is the triumph of sanity and sanitation over false and musty romance. That was my first stroke. 'Meet your dear one again at my reception parlor, *and take him back home!*' 'Why leave him in the tomb when you may have him at the table?' From that it was only a step to parties."

Mr. Montalba threw open the door at the end of the long passage along which he had discharged his soliloquy. The chamber was large. Through high windows on the left a flood of golden light — far more mellow than our common-or-garden sun ever emits — poured, in slanting rays, onto a fine Persian carpet. It was possible to see through the window. The ground

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outside it sparkled smoothly snow-white.

"Cosiness set in purity," whispered Mr. Montalba in my ear, "that's what we want when we are" — he paused, not so much to get the word as to see that I did — "*adjusting* to the new relationship."

On the side from the window was a cheerful fireplace where logs which had reached a perfect glow of incandescence continued indefinitely to candesce. The appositeness was so obvious that he only waved a kid-gloved hand toward it. Two fine Sheraton armchairs were drawn up each side of the hearth. Each was occupied, the occupants gazing meditatively at the glow.

"Perfect lighting for a restful impression — the gentle flickering light gives a sense of peace without any solemn rigidity. You see, the smiles seem almost to play. We flatter ourselves on our smiles and feel they deserve the best of lighting to bring them out. Anything set would be worse than a droop. We aim at a quiet playfulness and I am sure you will agree that we have hit it. When the loved one returns home, permanently" — the word was stressed — "we always arrange the homecoming. We have planned a series of 'settings' to suit every purse, from the simplest 'cosy-corner' just for one inmate to the family wing to be built on to mansions. We have just completed quite an ambitious design — the old family butler is seated in a small back room looking contentedly at some perfect rustless-steel replicas of the family silver, with his polishing cloth still in his hand. In the front room are the grandparents each side of the fire, with a few spare chairs for relations who drop in for a few moments — or come for good. Upstairs, at the piano, is their daughter, the charming consumptive, and turning her music, the young man who when she became permanent, for a while went quite to pieces, but now is perfectly recollected, composed. Keats would have found his Grecian Urn surpassed — 'For ever will he love and she be fair.' In the room above is the nursery, presided over, as it should be, by the dear old family nurse brooding over the little angel in his crib and the two-year-old gazing with childish solemnity at the fire."

"I'm not the Press," I got out at last.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Mr. Montalba's style changed in a twinkling. "Forgive me. We've only opened lately in this new mansion and of course we have roused much intelligent curiosity. I thought you were from a woman's magazine. But," and he already had my fingers between two grey gloved hands, "you had come for an appointment? You have a dear one ready or nearly ready to be permanented? Oh, please don't start — yes, we like a little notice. Sometimes I drop around and make just a study or two from life — get the pose, you know. Many people make all arrangements with me — in advance. Then I can — how may I put it —

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avoid any awkward little hiatus."

At last I broke through this mill-race of commercialized Lethe.

"Mr. Montalba," I said, "I have called to ask if you have received the — the remains of a Mr. Sibon?"

"Remains!" He breathed out the word as a smoker resists at the first whiff a base tobacco. "Please, please, quite the unhappiest of words. 'Relics' even have about them a quite unnecessary flavor of abandonment. 'Form' is the word. Everything we say and do is in good form, indeed the best. We receive the Form — an obsequious touch or two and 'Not marble's self nor the gilded monuments of princes can compare for lasting quality'."

I stuck my ground.

"Have you the Form of Mr. Sibon?"

"A relation?" He cooed.

"No, no, only an acquaintance."

"Well," he became confidential, "of course it's really very unprofessional, Mr. . . . Mr.?"

"Mr. Silchester."

"Mr. Silchester, we have to have our rules. I'm sure you'll understand. Next of kin have their rights, though I'm glad to say we so win confidence that they nearly always waive them. For all others — yes, even for blood relations — nothing till the opening day. Still, I will make an exception on your behalf. I don't mind telling you that from the moment I saw you, I saw you might have — I like the ecclesiastical word; our professions so neatly parallel — a vocation. Yes, Mr. Sibon is here, resting."

"He's alive then?" I'm afraid I blurted.

Mr. Montalba became arch, " 'Resting', I said," he corrected me. "Life is such a rush now. Always keeping up and keeping up appearances. And now he will be kept up. The upkeep is practically nominal. We include a ten year guarantee and inspection service with the initial costs."

"When did he die?" I shot in.

"Again I'm being so very unprofessional. My heart over my head, you know. But why shouldn't I? You're not the Press. And, I can't help it, I love a fellow enthusiast, as I see you are. Mr. Sibon was among the first of my clients to avail himself of our 'advance service'; when he felt that he was, as we put it, losing form, he sent for me. So I was able to be at his apartment when he — again a phrase we have put into circulation — handed over. So advisable for the transformation to have, as I have said, no hiatus. No, he hadn't been indisposed long. Just a little palpitation. It makes the calm all the more appreciated, by everyone, when the heart has been altogether a little too febrile."

He paused and then put his fat grey glove on my shoulder. It settled there like a heavy hot pigeon and then gave me a gentle push. His other hand pressed the panel of the big apartment's third wall. It swung back and he pushed me through. In my ear he whispered, "You are privileged. You shall see a newcomer before he has been actually fitted with his set-

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ting." The door closed behind us. We were in a dim passage with faint pink lights in the ceiling. Out of it another door opened. A light switched on. The room, its apricot glow lit up, was small but painted a cheerful rose. It contained only one article of furniture — a chair. But that was a comfortable one. And so the occupant seemed to find it. Dosing easily in it was — I knew at once from my previous visit to him — Sibon. I stepped up quickly and touched him on the shoulder.

"Oh, you shouldn't, you shouldn't!" Without looking round I could sense the smile in Mr. Montalba's whisper. "But you couldn't resist, could you? And I couldn't resist either, just letting you. We're fellow enthusiasts. I knew it."

For I had started back more quickly than I'd sprung forward. The shoulder I had touched was as hard and stiff as wood.

"Didn't you understand? Of course I can't help being pleased. It's His Master's Voice, isn't it, all over again. But this time it's the eye that's completely taken in, not the ear. Still I do hope you haven't been shocked. I did try, you will own, to save you *any* shock."

My mind was in an unpleasant whirl. I must sort out my impressions. First, this beastly taxidermist was, I could have no doubt, an enthusiast. He didn't care a straw for the living. It was corpses he loved. A modern "resurrection man," a civilized — not head-hunter but whole-body snatcher. Secondly, Sibon was dead — not a doubt of it. That horribly firm contact spoke volumes on the ultimate silence. The disgusting preservative had already turned him into a solid block. I remembered that in the short interview we had had before his death, he still had found time to complain of his heart and indeed seemed in some trouble with it.

Well, all that remained was to thank Mr. Montalba, Obsequist, and to report back. I turned. He was regarding me with an easy complacency.

"Are Mr. Sibon's relations coming to fetch him?" I asked.

"I'm afraid he had none."

"Then . . . ?" I paused.

"Well, again in confidence, I can tell you he bought himself a seat."

"A seat?"

"Yes, just before you go, please one more glance at our range of services." He ushered me out of the room and switched off the light. We went down the rose-lit passage. At the end was a large door. Mr. Montalba threw it open. That movement evidently set an organ playing. We were looking down quite a large choir. Stalls rose on either hand. Some were vacant but many were occupied by a congregation, some kneeling, others sitting.

"A number of clients, especially when the home atmosphere hasn't been completely cooperative, prefer to take to a more specifically ecclesiastical air. Home is surely sacred but here we have an alternative sanctity."

It certainly was. Incense for the nose. Electric candles and stained glass

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for the eyes. Subdued Gregorian chanting for the ear.

I retreated. Here was complete closure. Across the ultimate mystery Mr. Montalba had drawn the thickest tapestry of sham man had ever woven. And here Sibon — or all that the Law could look for — the body of Sibon, would stay secure ("Immaculate" would have been Mr. Mantalba's word) in the heaviest odor of sanctity. What a getaway for the cleverest of international crooks, just as a convict's garb, if not a hempen cravat, was being got ready for him!

Mr. Montalba waved to me from the door. "Come again, and of course whenever you feel need of service you will remember ours is — I don't boast, I know — incomparable."

I hailed a taxi and drove back to our hotel. In his usual way, Mr. Mycroft showed no surprise as I gave him my surely unusual story. As he made no comment, and that's always a little galling, I added as a colophon, "Well, the mission you sent me on has closed the case."

"Why?" he asked with a sort of irritating innocence.

"Well, I've seen Sibon and, unpleasant but convincing fact, actually touched him."

"Does that prove he's got away?"

"Well, when you took me along to see him, I was as close to him as I'm to you now; and I was as close as this, this afternoon, to what's left of him now."

"Yes, yes, but he knew why we had come. If the game wasn't closing I wouldn't have taken you. It gave a second witness and prevented him — he's Gascon and so impulsive — from giving way to any melodramatic action which, while of course fatal to his chances, might have been even more fatal to my expectations."

"But he *was* ill."

"Possibly, possibly: though you recall, after his valet had gone to tell him we'd called, though he kept us waiting a little while, he then came to the door himself."

"But I don't see. . . ."

"Did I say I expected that of you?"

"But I have seen the corpse and you haven't!"

"If I allow your conclusion, perhaps I may be permitted to doubt your initial premise."

When Mr. Mycroft is like that I've learned to leave him alone. I venture to believe that being right as often as he has — and so often when people thought him wrong — has slightly affected his judgment. So I simply asked, "Why did you send me to see, then, and not go yourself?" But of course that was a mistake — I saw that the moment I'd said it. And Mr. Mycroft's quiet check-mate, "Because I thought Mr. Montalba and you would get on better than he and I," left me no opening but to leave the room. As I was leaving, however, as usual, the old master relented:

"Please remember that you did something I couldn't have done. I am not going to say you weren't *taken* in. I really don't know. But I am going to allow that you *got* in so far as

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to bring back much more than I had hoped. Now, Mr. Silchester, if you will use your other great gift by ordering one of your excellently planned dinners to be sent up to this small sitting-room of ours — while you plan that strategy, I'll go over this other game and see whether it is as closed as it seems. *Au revoir* for an hour."

I left the old bird quite gay. After all, as he'd more than once remarked, we were complementary — quite a compliment from him.

Certainly whatever Mr. Mycroft thought of me as a messenger, he left me in no unpleasant doubts as to his opinion of my gift as a *maître d'hôtel*. The hotel in which we stayed during this affair was one of bungalows served from a central and excellent kitchen. There, with a fine chief-of-staff, I planned something that even during the planning took the taste of preservative out of my mouth. When the attack was deployed, Mr. Mycroft executed dignified justice on some decapitated prawns which had absorbed into their systems a white wine sauce and awaited sentence on anchovy toast. He stirred the cream into his Borscht, watching the white and crimson maze with a professional eye. With a neat surgical touch he disclosed the truffles and chestnuts which the roast pheasant was concealing on her person. The structure of the *bombe glacé* he demonstrated with technical ease. The angels-on-horseback that brought up the rear, he dismounted with a chivalrous lance.

As we sat over our coffee he said: "I wonder whether I can answer this little mortician mystery anything like as well as you have today solved the perennial problem of the menu! We must remember precisely where we are. If you see precisely where you are, you can generally see considerably further than you think."

Yes, that was a typical prologue and promised well. I made a sound which I'd discovered was the perfect antiphon — a kind a *Humph* — half "hear, hear" and half "Howdymean?"

"First, there's Sibon himself — getting on in years. Real crooks never carry their years well. Sibon is of course the 'grand manner' crook, seldom stooping to anything under the 50,000 figure and of course in his heyday he would never have been so *outré* as to go armed. His name will always have its niche in the annals of crime because we may say that he really opened up that large neglected mine, the Indian Rajahs' palaces. Till his date crooks took such tropical fish as swam into their northern nets, as an occasional purloining of a really fine stone, a bit of none too pretty blackmail about some all too pretty white female. But Sibon had the pioneer's pluck to go out and open up that rich field. He is said to have had some equally odd adventures. If you're caught in those preserves you are not so much held as parted. The Rajah usually holds a piece of your anatomy as a pledge against your return. Sibon is evidently still fairly intact — if you leave out that proble-

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matical heart. But he has extradition proceedings closing round him. He's old, yes, and may be ill, and he is certainly ready, very ready to be forgotten. But that is not quite the same as saying that he is prepared to go to where all things are forgotten? Sibon's wish — we want his wish to know his possible whereabouts — is to disappear.

"Secondly, there's myself. I want Sibon because his range of past activities awakes my professional curiosity. I'm ready to catch him now. I went with you to see him a couple of days ago because I wanted him to stand his ground and I judged he would if he knew I was nearly ready to pounce. All went well, you recall. He kept his head when he saw us. And when he keeps his head I'd gladly exchange mine for his. He saw at once I wouldn't go to see him if I had *all* my clues ready, but I would go when I was nearly ready, just to see how the land lay. He was no doubt ill. But his illness was also charmingly apposite. I repeat, really bad heart cases don't dismiss their valet and come themselves to welcome uninvited guests. This morning we learn that he'd had a fatal attack in the night and, in accord with modern hygiene, the most fashionable mortician — I beg Mr. Montalba's pardon, obsequist — took over the Form. Yes, I like that word. Mr. Sibon may have been out of condition but he was certainly in form.

"So, thirdly, you come in. You call on Mr. Montalba and ask if Mr. Sibon has settled in. Straight questions are always best especially when asked," he paused a moment and I thought he was going to say, "by simple people," but he repeated the happier adjective "straight."

"But then the story runs too straight. True crime like true love never does. Mr. Montalba's reception of you" — he looked up at me with that long twisted smile of his. "Mr. Silchester, we have hunted together until we both appreciate each other's gifted oddities. I know, I allow, that whereas I might have made a competent surgeon or pharmacist, you might have made more than a moderate success as a *maître d'hotel* — but a mortician, even if called an obsequist, never! Why did Mr. Montalba welcome you with the high title of confrère?"

"He mistook me for the Press."

"That was only at the start. Besides the Press aren't confrères of such confectioners as Mr. Montalba. They are blood brothers of the police. They both prefer their quarry fresh and sanguinary, not a waxen preservative. No, you were such a *success fou* with this modist of the morgue that my curiosity is aroused. Let sleeping Sibon lie. Maybe he is sleeping as heavily as you thought. Even wanted crooks have died conveniently, for themselves. There's nothing too coincidental about that. Being hunted at over 50 is certainly not good for the heart. But your description of the present possessor of his Form does, I own, intrigue me. I must see for myself. After all, until I have, as coroners say,

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viewed the body, I can't officially enter the case as closed."

The next morning our cab drew up under the *porte cochere* of the Montalba building. As we alit I glanced up at the front. There was nothing secretive about even the side façade. Windows stood open with flowers in them. Then my eye caught sight of someone glancing down at us, beside a large vase of wall flowers and forget-me-not. I expected the observer, seeing himself observed, would withdraw his head, but he retained his casually curious glance too long. Of course, I should have known at once: it was a Form taking the air, so as to show clients what a charming summer, semi-out-of-door effect could be composed, when the hot weather made dreaming by the fireside a seasonal anachronism.

When I looked down, the door was already open and Mr. Mycroft was enquiring, for Mr. Montalba himself had not answered the door. Instead a junior Obsequist was bowing us in — an understudy of the master modelled in the same uniform of pearl grey morning suit.

"Mr. Montalba will be with you in a moment."

And we were left in a cheerful small study looking out into a little court where an almond tree was in almost too full bloom.

"The master knows his Ecclesiastes, I see," said Mr. Mycroft, glancing at it, but I had bent to stroke a particularly fine grey Persian which was dozing in a seat by the window. I nearly collided with Mr. Mycroft in my recoil. Of course the beautiful creature was cold and hard as a block.

"You didn't," remarked Mr. Mycroft, "expect to find anything but Forms here? The animal funeral business has grown with modern sentimentality until it's too profitable a side-line not to be combined with the human traffic."

The door opened.

"You've come again and brought another interested party. An advance visit! How wise. We do learn with the advancing years to take Time by the forelock and make every rightful provision. And, as I said yesterday, as an artist — and now not speaking in my other rôle as family adviser — I, too, deeply appreciate the opportunity for preliminary study, to get an impression from the life, the fleeting life, which afterwards I may be permitted, privileged, to make enduring and place above, safely above, the eroding tides of Time. And, if I may say so, what a noble presence we shall here preserve unchanging for the future. So often — I confess it — I have to extemporize just a little. Look at the Form as I will, with whatever generosity of appreciation, still it remains stubbornly jejune. Even death cannot ennoble those who lived commonplace."

I wondered what the mischief Mr. Mycroft would make of this attack. He didn't: he simply ignored it. Apparently it struck him as neither funny nor significant. I'd noticed that in him before. If he felt that the man

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he was with was acting he was far too interested in watching the act and wondering why it was being put on, to be amused, far less disconcerted. And in his queer way Mr. Montalba was all actor, all a series of stock-parts, artist, family friend, business manager — evidently he, too, didn't care a straw if one of the parts didn't get over. As quickly as a sportsman who has missed reloads and shoots again, he shot off another little speech.

"But you wanted to tell me something, just a little confidential." The family friend was of course all discretion, tact and oblique deference.

"You were good enough to let my friend Mr. Silchester see your latest masterpiece. I had the privilege of studying Mr. Sibon in the life. I would value the opportunity to see him in Aeternitas."

I felt sure that Mr. Montalba must resist such a frontal attack. After all he had the "blood-relation" formula to hand. I experienced a fresh, and I must say an unpleasant, surprise, when Mr. Mycroft's challenge was welcomed with a fresh burst of synthetic pleasure.

"Delighted, delighted! I've told Mr. Silchester that it *is* a privilege to have the private view before the masterpiece — as you so kindly phrase it — is framed. But rules should never be rigid — indeed, my motto might well be that of Life itself, 'Good Form is never rigid.' I welcome the opportunity to compare notes with another student of the Sibon form."

We had been swept along to the accompaniment of this rear-action smoke-screen — through the parlor of posthumous preserves with its synthetic sunlight, firelight and flesh — into that passage leading to the final sanctuary. The small door on the left was swung open: and there was Sibon as still as the Statues of Memnon and more silent.

The only change was that the light seemed even kinder, more rosy. But when I brought myself to scan the too too solid Form of Sibon, I viewed it with repugnance. Mr. Mycroft's interest was as great, though without repugnance. He was peering down at it with little grunts of admiring recognition. I glanced up and saw Mr. Montalba's own glassy good form relax for a moment with a gleam of triumph.

"A pretty piece of work, you allow, Mr. Mycroft?"

"Remarkable, indeed."

And with that Mr. Mycroft whipped out of his pocket a large pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and popped them onto his nose. I would have been far less startled had he whipped out a pair of handcuffs and clapped them onto Mr. Montalba's wrists. For I knew my old dominie's eyes were sharper than anyone's. He used to say, "Picking up clues exercises the eye-muscles." I could only think that the rosy glow threw out his vision temporarily. But it was clear that the glasses didn't help. More it was clear that he couldn't have been used to wearing them. For he had no sooner leaned forward to study the exhibit, than the spectacles.

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slid down his long nose so swiftly that before he could catch them, they fell plump on the plump Sibon hand which lay relaxed in its lap.

"Oh, forgive me. I'm new to glasses. My admiration made me anxious not to miss the really wonderful detail."

He retrieved the glasses deftly and popped them closed into his pocket.

"Too kind, too kind," he murmured turning to Mr. Montalba, who was already bowing us through the door. "Quite wonderful. Who can deny progress when at last here we see Time arrested."

"Truly glad that you appreciate our effort to round out and complete the modern program of social endeavour."

The two masked fencers kept up their rally until the front door closed between them. I was at a loss to know which had scored most points. Neither seemed to have made an actual "touch."

And in the automobile Mr. Mycroft, perhaps I need hardly say, did not enlighten me. When we were back in our apartment he still preserved his silence. I took up a book. But he didn't do anything but sit. Then after a few minutes I saw him move. He put his hand into his breast pocket and pulled out those glasses. He looked at them; not through them. He was examining the right-hand hinge. He began to work at the hinge and then drew toward him a small piece of notepaper. On working the hinge again, he seemed content and put the glasses aside on the table and picked up the small sheet. Then he took that rather melodramatic lens out of his waistcoat pocket and began to study the paper.

Bored with watching this routine — as routine as a cat washing its whiskers when the mouse has temporarily given it the slip — I idly picked up the spectacles Mr. Mycroft had abandoned. I tried one lens and then the other. Finally I slipped them on.

"But these . . ." I began. And then the silly things slid off my nose just as, in the obsequarium, they had skidded down from Mr. Mycroft's beak. The small clatter and my unfinished sentence made Mr. Mycroft look up.

"You're surprised at the simplicity of those lenses?" he questioned. "The spectacles are made — as you've demonstrated — rather to give the slip than to detect it. But if you will look you'll see they're sharp enough in their way. That's blood on your finger."

I saw I'd made a small but clean little cut on my knuckle as I'd tried to save the silly stage-property spectacles from falling.

"I don't see why you should fool about with sham spectacles that won't even stay on, and are so badly made as to scratch one's fingers."

I was a little tart. But Mr. Mycroft had gone back to considering his scrap of paper. After dabbing my finger with iodine, I saw Mr. Mycroft rise, fetch his microscope, and put his precious scrap on its specimen-rack. That, though, didn't satisfy him and

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he fetched an electric torch to add to the illumination. After all, I thought, maybe his eyes are going. But the torch didn't seem to help either. Instead, he now began poking at his precious object with a small glass rod which he took out of a phial. Suddenly the whole thing seemed to bore him. He put the microscope aside, not troubling even to remove the small piece of paper which he had been studying, and remarking over his shoulder, "I've a call to make," left the room. He was back, though, in a couple of minutes saying, "It's not too late to make a call."

"I thought you'd made one," I began. But he didn't seem to hear and did assume that I was going along with him. "Hotel Magnifique," which he said to the taxi-man as we got into the cab, made me assume that he was going again to try and pump its bland but ultra-discreet management about its late guest. The reception clerk's "M. Sibon is away" was certainly a parry. Mr. Mycroft's "But his valet's in: I'll leave a message with him" swept it aside and in a couple of minutes we found ourselves standing outside the door of the late Sibon's luxurious suite. Nor did we experience a check there. The door was opened by the dapper, very French-looking manservant who had admitted us on our original visit. As before, he bowed so low that his black pointed beard must have stuck into his cravat while he presented to us a mass of black polished hair smooth as silk. I thought he started for an instant when Mr. Mycroft shot out: "Is M. Sibon at home?" Then bending still lower and with a catch in his voice:

"Haven't you heard, sir? Called away, called away."

I was just wondering whether this was an euphemism for falling into Mr. Montalba's very arresting hands, when the valet added, "He left a note for you, sir. I didn't know you'd call this evening. I have it in the pantry," and he stepped back into a small side door which evidently led to the servants' quarters. The door swung to behind him. But Mr. Mycroft was just in time to prevent it latching. He flung it back, I followed, and we hurried into the small pantry, just as the door at its other end snapped to.

"Through the dining room!" called Mr. Mycroft, wheeling round on me. We doubled back, raced through the dining room into the kitchen. As we reached it we heard the sound of the service elevator on the back staircase begin to whirr. We were out on those stairs in five seconds but only to catch sight of the floor of the elevator ascending.

"Up the stairs!" Mr. Mycroft was already up half a dozen of the steps. What he was up to, chasing a dead man's valet, I couldn't imagine, but I felt I couldn't leave the old fellow now. Fortunately Sibon had liked pent-house privacy, so we had only one flight to scramble. As we tumbled out on the roof I saw the valet looking back at us, his strained face clear in the light from the wellshaft. To my huge relief he made no stand, and

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as even the smallest dog will chase a bull if it turns tail, I rushed after Mr. Mycroft. The roof area of the Magnifique is not only extensive, it is also rich in what golf players call hazards. I tripped over pipes, doubled round flues and chimneys in the wake of Mr. Mycroft's comet-like coat, and stumbled in rain-gutters. It was after one of these that I lost the hunt and only after peering round half a dozen smokestacks, at last came upon Mr. Mycroft kneeling. Beside him, seated rather carelessly against a cased-in pipe, was the valet. He was certainly very much out of breath — far more than either of us, though he had had a lift-start. Then, through the panting, I could hear him saying to Mr. Mycroft, "In my left upper waistcoat pocket. Quick. It's Sodium Amytal." Without a word Mr. Mycroft did as he was told and put something into the valet's mouth; then he remarked slowly, "You shouldn't practice such exercises."

The other said faintly, "I ran because I was frightened and my heart gave out."

"No, no," came the reply. "You speak English as well as I do. I said exercises not exercise. Your heart hasn't given out just because of this evening's amble over the eaves."

The valet's "How do you know?" left me more lost than ever. And Mr. Mycroft's "Because I'm as fit as I am," completed my bewilderment. But neither had a moment's care for my unenlightened condition. They were quite taken up with each other. Evidently Mr. Mycroft could remember me as soon as I could be of any use. He had hold of the valet, how or why it was too dark to see, and without turning said, "Go down and get the hotel doctor at once."

In five minutes I was back with the very capable medico which the Magnifique retained for its guests. We brought a couple of torches with us. As soon as we picked up Mr. Mycroft I saw that the valet was gone. In his place, looking far less life-like than Mr. Montalba's creation, lay Sibon.

"Dr. Armstrong," Mr. Mycroft had turned on us. "Please examine this body. I believe he is now dead." The doctor knelt beside Mr. Mycroft. After a moment I heard him say, "Yes, yes, not a doubt of it. He's limp enough now. . . . But I don't understand . . . how . . . ?"

"Oh, you were quite justified considering your premises," replied Mr. Mycroft. "I must keep the actual Hows and Whys for the Police. A plainclothes man has at my request been stationed at the main entrance the last hour. If you would be so good as to stay with the body, I'll drop down and have a word with him. Come, Mr. Silchester."

The word was quite brief. They seemed to understand each other. The quietly dressed man who looked as though he might be an insurance agent slipped across the big lounge and disappeared toward the back premises.

"We shan't be wanted till tomorrow and then you needn't come. I expect you've had enough of even the most

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modern of morgues and where Aristide Sibon's Form will rest tonight — and be interviewed tomorrow — is not a very obsequious obsequarium. And now for dinner."

In spite of our hunt having ended in a *morte*, I must say we both did justice to our evening meal. My curiosity revived. And evidently Mr. Mycroft was also relaxed and ready to feed my mind as well as I had fed his form.

I began naturally at the end: "I thought that Dr. Armstrong signed Sibon's death certificate a couple of days ago?"

"He certainly did. Without that, not even Mr. Montalba's patter could have won him 'the fair and desired form'."

"But I don't understand —"

"Don't you think we might omit the obvious?" asked Mr. Mycroft, smiling. "The story has points, I own, which only out-of-the-way knowledge would catch. I shall enjoy running over them. First, we are agreed Dr. Armstrong is capable. Dr. Armstrong sees Sibon, sees him alive, and sees him, he is equally sure dead. The certificate is Syncope. But you remember the doctor's remark, 'He's limp enough now?"

"Yes, that's a natural enough remark — simply meant he was dead."

"No, more than that. It means that last time Dr. Armstrong certified Aristide Sibon to be deceased, he was not limp."

"But he must have been, to be certified. Dr. Armstrong, as he was on duty in the Hotel, would have been called at once."

"You mean Sibon couldn't have been other than limp — to be exact, the body wouldn't be rigid — in *rigor mortis* — for some considerable time after death?"

I nodded: the subject was not postprandially pleasant, but I knew enough about posthumous conditions to know that.

"Oh, no," Mr. Mycroft sailed on, "any shock in these heart cases can end with the *rigor* coming on with death itself. After all, the cause of death in such a case is cramp of the heart and it then spreads to all the other muscles. Just because Dr. Armstrong *was* a good doctor he was not surprised. But because he was trained in schools which know more about muscles than mind, he was wrong."

My "But I don't understand" rose like a hiccup and was as such rebuked by a shake of my teacher's head.

"Sibon, you remember, had made India his crook's preserve. He spent many years there unloading Rajahs. Sibon and I, however, have this in common — we both always study our terrain. All's grist to our mill. At one end Rajahs and their jewels and at the other Yogis and their 'jewels in the lotus' — they are both products of India. Now if you want to lie really low — and it is, of course, a crook's greatest need after a coup — you can never lie so low as if you are buried. Our agile Aristide learned the Hathi trick of tongue-swallowing and breath-control — the way of bringing on self-

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induced catalepsy. So, you see, he gives out that he has a 'heart' and he can show it to the doctor while it is doing the queerest of tricks, for conscious control of the heart-beat is one of the preliminary exercises for suspended animation. Then he has Mr. Montalba at hand to whisk him away to the Obsequarium — where he puts on his final trick of what one may call real sham death. Unfortunately, I send you round to call on that interesting couple too soon. Aristide had to play the part of a sleeping partner. He hadn't the skill to bring himself to. For ten persons who train far enough to put themselves *into* catalepsy, not one can get himself out. He has to be retrieved, brought to.

"One thing I don't know — a small but amusing point. Did Mr. Montalba, who was to act, again literally, as a 'resurrection man', delay Sibon's return to the world because he couldn't help it, because he couldn't get his partner out of the jail of his own body as soon as they hoped, or because he couldn't resist fooling you? A man who is always playing with corpses may have his own sense of fun. What I am sure was arranged was that Sibon should leave his Form at the Obsequarium, and should I or my faithful friend call, or the police, they would be shown certificate *and* the body. But you certainly called too soon."

"Too soon?"

"Yes, because the substitute wasn't ready."

"Substitute?"

"Of course: a perfect model was in the making and it was to be substituted for our temporarily rigid but only suspendedly animated Sibon."

"Substitute! But surely all that's supposition!"

For answer Mr. Mycroft only said, "Look here."

He'd swing the microscope onto the table, with the scrap of paper still in its grip. But this time he made me clap my eye to the lens, though he himself went through the little ritual of the extra light and then the touch with the small glass rod. I saw in the high-magnitude field a large lump, rather like "mutton-fat" jade.

"That bulb is quite hot," said Mr. Mycroft's voice in my ear. "But, you see, the scrap of mastic does not soften. So it isn't parafin wax, the basis for the Aeternitas treatment. But this essential oil, on the glass rod tip, does begin to melt it."

True enough, as the rod touched the lump it began to "lose form." Mr. Mycroft pushed the microscope away.

"That scrap is not from a body treated by the Aeternitas method. It's from a gutta percha model. I knew in that sunset-glowing room, I'd have to touch that Form to make sure. Pink light's the devil's delight: you can't see anything in it clearly and you think you can. That's why mediums love a rosy illumination. More, I should really get an actual specimen. So I had these glasses made with the facet of one of the hinges as sharp as a razor — like a small scoop. And I took care, of course, that the spectacles

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themselves *didn't* fit, and so would be sure to fall off my nose onto the Form's hand as soon as I peered admiringly at it. As I retrieved my clumsy blunder, it was easy to make the little blade dredge a specimen of the skin."

"So *I* saw Sibon — the real Sibon!"

"You had that honor. Mr. Montalba probably thought he'd better show you that Sibon was there and as the model wasn't ready, and he feared such a call, he kept Sibon in trance. Had he felt safe and had time, no doubt he'd have taken the crook out of his catalepsy sooner. But he wasn't going to take the risk of being found without the body and, should a search be called for, the discovery of a half-made model. That would have been too awkward. So he took the risk with his sleeping partner instead, who for once had to stay as he was put and not even speak when spoken to."

"Risk?"

"Oh, yes, very considerable. He kept him longer in catalepsy than is safe. Of course, men who are amazingly fit can stay "out" for many days. But not Sibon. The exercise is not to be recommended for the heart and Sibon had a heart, either from that kind of effort at lying low or the opposite effort of keeping on the run — perhaps both combined. Well, after you leave, Mr. Montalba *does* bring him to and substitutes the model. Sibon can then go back to the Magnifique. The safest place, when you're wanted, is home — if you're disguised; and he was — as his valet."

"But where was his valet?"

"*He* was. That was rather neat preparation, don't you think? Remember when we called — there was a pause after the valet went to call him and then the great man graciously came out himself and welcomed us. The pause, of course, was because, in theatre language, he was 'doubling the parts' and so he had to make a 'quick change.' As soon as I was quite sure that was a gutta percha model, I knew that Sibon was back at his hotel. The phone call I then made was to the police — to tell them to watch the downstairs exits and arrest Mr. Sibon's valet, if he tried to leave. I knew then he'd bolt for the roof. He'd soon find that the police were on below. Those men are always inspecting their exits, as a bird turns round between every pull at a worm — second nature. He'd feel safe, though, in his disguise, with an alibi body amply viewed elsewhere. He'd bolt only when we turned up. I guessed we'd have an easy run, for I was pretty sure with all those cataleptic tricks he'd have a bad heart. Still I thought we'd have a catch, not a kill. Both those fellows, Sibon and Montalba, are by nature largely mountebanks. But one played possum once too often. If you play at death, that grim player may take you in earnest."

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*For further editorial comment on this story, see page 128.*

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*Philip Wylie, the brilliant author of* GENERATION OF VIPERS *and* NIGHT UNTO NIGHT, *is one of those people often referred to as having had a "checkered career." A prolific and streamlined writer (he once dictated a 100,000-word novel in nine days, while crossing the Atlantic), Mr. Wylie has been a press agent, an advertising manager, an editor, a movie scenarist, a newspaper columnist, to say nothing of having worked on farms, in factories, and on ships.*

*In this issue Mr. Wylie starts a new series about a new detective — at least, he will be new to most of you. Meet Willis Perkins, a pale, slight, undersized man, who at middle age had the colossal courage, in a shy sort of way, to resign his clerical position at the bank (after twenty-six years of inconspicuous yes-sirring!) and brave a new world of terror and danger — as an amateur criminologist!*

*Consider: until Willis Perkins took the fateful plunge, his most daring adventure had been the experiment of growing a mustache!*

*But during all those years at the bank, unhonored and unsung, Perkins had gone to night school, studying chemistry, psychology, and other scientific shortcuts to supersleuthery. He had even practised (though not mastered) the art of disguise. And now at forty-six he was ready to inspect, suspect, and detect — or reasonable facsimiles!*

*We call your special attention to the title of this first of the Perkins peradventures — "Perkins' 'First Case.' " The second story (to appear in an early issue) will be called "Perkins' Second 'First Case.' " Here is probably the only instance in the whole history of the detective story in which a detective makes not one but two separate and distinct débuts! And that is not all. The third Perkins performance will be called "Perkins' 'Last Case.' " But don't believe all you see: Perkins' "Last Case" may not be more final than an actor's or opera singer's "farewell" appearance. True, we have only three Perkins stories, including the one in this issue, under lock and key; but we hope to be successful in persuading Mr. Wylie to write a fourth short story which will be titled — you've guessed it! — "Perkins' Second 'Last Case' "! And wind, weather, and Wylie permitting* — ad infinitum!

# PERKINS' "FIRST CASE"

*by PHILIP WYLIE*

PATROLMAN BARNARD MURPHY crossed Seventh Avenue and sauntered into the Chelsea district of New York City. His eyes were pleasant, his stick flashed in the sunlight, and his entire aspect belied any notion of crime or vice. It would have been impossible to look at Patrolman Murphy and think simultaneously of chattering machine guns or sagging safe doors. At the fruit stand he paused for an apple. The proprietor of a cigar and candy store in the next block greeted him with a Havana Perfecto. The newsboy in the third block on his beat offered a copy of a late morning paper.



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These tributes to the Law were genially accepted.

At Number 186 on the second street he paused and whistled. A very blonde head — so blonde that it somewhat dulled the sunlight — appeared at a window.

"Good morning, Mr. Murphy."

"Good morning, Janet."

"Have you apprehended any dangerous criminals this morning?"

He grinned. "Only one — and I cannot take her into custody — yet."

The girl laughed. "But you think someday you will?"

"Sure I will. The charge'll be manslaughter — me dying of joy — and the sentence'll be life."

Janet lifted her eyebrows. "It will not. Who loves a cop? Who'd marry a flatfoot that didn't have any more future than a long life of arresting drunks and turning over lost valuables to the proper department?"

"Nobody," Murphy agreed. "But someday I'll be Captain of the precinct — and maybe Inspector. Who knows? I've done things that make me think I'd not be so bad as Commissioner even."

The laughter that followed was so prolonged that even Murphy began to grin either in sympathy or at its cause. Some time later he moved reluctantly away from Number 186 — and the golden head leaned far out to watch him go. He turned a corner and then another. The sun was hot. At Sam's Parlour he refused a lemonade but at Tom's ice stand he paused.

Tom was evidently away, making a delivery. A dozen blocks of ice stood in the shade on the sidewalk, partially covered with a tarpaulin. There was an ice pick on the table Tom maintained for the writing of orders by his customers during his frequent absences. Murphy associated three ideas — the heat, the ice and the pick. He was on the point of chipping off a fragment from one of the blocks when his eye was caught by something on the pick. It was a crimson blot, smeared at the juncture of the handle and the shaft. Murphy touched the spot with his finger and it came away red.

He regarded his finger and his first thought was that the red substance looked singularly like blood. He next peered up and down the street. Finally, he tilted his hat back on his head.

An ice pick would make an excellent dagger. Blood on the point of an ice pick would seem to indicate that some one had used it carelessly and nicked his finger. Blood on the hilt, however, was subject to a different interpretation. Murphy, for all his geniality and good humor, was a serious man. He was serious about his work and himself and about Janet. The object he held in his hand was worth considerable serious thought: it might be related to some unpleasant affair, and it might be so innocent that it would make any suspicion seem absurd.

That occurred to Murphy in a rapid sequence. Tom the ice dealer had a cellar. Into it Murphy went at

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once, but his search revealed only neat piles of wood stored for the next winter. When Murphy re-emerged on the street, Tom was visible. He approached casually, an empty bucket on his shoulder. The Patrolman slipped the ice pick carefully into a pocket. He nodded to Tom.

"How's business?"

"Fine!"

"Been away long?"

"Yeah. Half-hour. Somebody looking for me?"

Murphy shook his head. "No." He inspected Tom's hands. There was not a scratch on them.

Tom did not appear to notice that his ice pick was missing. He took another from his table and began to chip one of the blocks in half. Murphy walked away. After all — a little red on a sharp tool — nothing. But he could not convince himself it was nothing. All day he went about his routine sorely perplexed whenever he thought of the ice pick or felt it in his pocket.

Late in the afternoon he went off duty. His footsteps directed him back to Chelsea.

On the top floor of a brownstone house, on the West side, not far from the river and directly opposite Tom's Ice & Coal Stand, lived Willis Perkins. He was a frail and wispish man of middle age. Except for bright and eager eyes, his total impression was one of negatives and shaded grays. In a crowd he would have been undiscernible. In any party of four or five he would have been the one man a casual observer could not remember, the one man who would have made it impossible to recall whether there were four people or five in the group. For twenty-six years he had turned the pages of ledgers in a bank, and he had become as anonymous as those dusty and impersonal volumes.

Very few people knew Willis Perkins. Fewer still knew that, on his forty-sixth birthday, he had resigned his position at the Bank. And the persons could be counted on one hand who knew that mild, inconspicuous and slight Willis Perkins was a detective. Not that he belonged to the Force or worked for an agency. He was a self-made detective. During all the long and colorless years he had spent at the Bank he had prepared for a life of crime and violence. He had read every mystery story he could buy or borrow. He had taken a dozen courses in night school, which he attended solely for the pursuit of subjects related to criminal detection. His library consisted only of books related to crime, and the rear room of his two-room suite was devoted to his instruments, his disguises, his laboratory.

Murphy was one of the people who knew about Willis Perkins. One night the nascent detective had been trying a disguise and Murphy, perceiving the obvious falseness of wig and beard, had apprehended him. Perkins, very nearly in tears because of his mortification at the failure of his disguise, had explained. Murphy was,

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above all things, a human being. He understood the lonely little man. He listened to his story and afterward, because Perkins was proud to make a friend on the Force, he went to Perkins' rooms.

He was somewhat amazed to discover the extent of Perkins' equipment. He was kind enough not to laugh when Perkins expounded his theories of crime. And after that, he had always saluted Perkins deferentially. A nut, but a kindly, whimsical, harmless nut. A sleuth without authority to act or a crime to investigate. A simple man who had retired from work and followed his pointless hobby alone.

On this late afternoon, however, Murphy went toward Perkins' house with a purpose. He was going to set his mind at rest about the ice pick. Perkins had a microscope. Murphy remembered that. And Perkins had said that he had studied chemistry — "the chemistry of blood, and dust, and ashes. The chemistry a detective must know."

The Patrolman rang a doorbell, pushed open the door, and walked up three flights of carpeted stairs. Perkins stood in the hall. His face lit up when he saw the policeman. He spoke — perhaps as he imagined Sherlock Holmes would speak.

"Ah! Murphy! A pleasant evening."

"Hello, Mr. Perkins. I came to see you about a little matter."

"Excellent. Come inside." He pulled a chair forward fussily.

Murphy sat in it and his eyes travelled over the rows of books. "Been busy, Mr. Perkins?"

"Very. I've been compiling a scrap book of gem thefts. According to the press there have been eighty-six in this vicinity in the past seven months. Some of them very similar. Suggestive — eh?"

The Patrolman smiled. "Sure. Suspect anybody?"

"Not yet. Not yet. But I'm working toward it." His impatience was stamped on his face, but Perkins knew his role. He took a chair and lit a pipe and stretched out his feet.

"Well, Murphy, what's on your mind?" He said it precisely as if half the New York police force visited him every day about some "little matter" or other.

The Policeman looked away politely. "If I could give you a few spots of dried blood, could you put it under the microscope and tell me if it was human blood?"

"Elementary, Murphy. The microscope — and other tests."

"Good. Would you do it?"

"At once."

Murphy took the ice pick from his coat. He handed it to Perkins. Presently, without a word, he rose and went into his "laboratory." Murphy shook his head and waited. He could hear the faint chinking of instruments. At last Perkins came back.

"It is human blood," he said. "Just as I thought."

"Huh!"

"Would you — ah — care to reveal its source?"

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Murphy hesitated. Finally he shrugged. "Found it on Tom's little sidewalk table this morning. But that's all I found and nobody's been hurt in this precinct today."

For five minutes Perkins turned the pick in his hands.

"If it was on the point," he observed, "you would deduce an accidental slip. But here — it looks pretty much as if some one had been stabbed."

Murphy nodded. "That's what I thought. But without a body — well —"

"Embarrassing, eh?"

Murphy laughed. "Not that. Dumb, that's all. The only people that do any killing to amount to anything around here are the gangs — and they shoot. Thompson guns. Rods. They don't use ice picks." He held out his hand. "I'm getting soft-headed — that's all."

When he had gone, Perkins behaved strangely. He first hugged himself and danced an extemporaneous hornpipe. Then he threw himself in a chair, lit his pipe again with a combination of flourish and ceremony, and shut his eyes tightly. There had been long, dull years in the bank — years of dreaming. And now one of those dreams was a fact. A policeman had come to him for information. Few men are able to adhere to a goal for twenty-six years without a fragment of encouragement. Perkins was one of them.

He had read everything printed about detectives. He had studied to be a detective. He was regarded by the handful of people who knew about him as a "queer" man, a recluse with a passionate hobby. But now — he would be a detective!

He concentrated for two hours. Then he went out for his supper. There were, he knew, two schools of detectives in fiction: those who never ate while on a case, and those who took care to keep at the highest physical pitch of health. He belonged to the latter school. He dined. Then he went to Tom's Ice and Coal stand. The cellar was closed but Tom stood outside.

Perkins said, "Good evening."

Tom said, "Hot."

Perkins said, "Isn't it?" There was a pause. He added. "You sell a lot of ice now, I suppose."

"Yeah."

Perkins indicated an ice pick. "Must wear out a lot of these."

"Yeah."

"How many do you keep on hand?"

Tom shrugged. "I dunno. Mebbe six. Mebbe ten."

And that, Perkins realized, constituted what was technically known as a blind alley. There was no hint in Tom's face of devious knowledge, no tremor at the mention of ice picks. The entire case began and ended with the fact that a policeman had found an ice pick with blood on it. The blood was at the hilt. The only people suspected of murder in a general way by the officer were gangsters and they never used anything but guns.

Perkins was baffled. He admitted as

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much to himself. There was no parallel for this in all the annals of crime — real or fictitious. He had no basis for beginning a case like this one. A lethal weapon bearing evidence of crime had been found — but no crime. That was the tragedy: there was no crime, and Perkins wished desperately that a crime could be uncovered.

Perkins returned to his house. His bed time was eleven, but for two hours after that he remained wide awake, tossing restlessly, conjecturing, theorizing. He made no progress.

When he arose in the morning, however, and spread out the paper which was deposited at his door at seven every day, he glanced at the headlines, caught his breath, read a few words, and then dressed hastily. He stuffed the paper into his pocket and rushed out on the street in search of Murphy. The story he read was commonplace. It had not even been given a two-column headline:

GANG CHIEF TAKEN FOR RIDE

*Another Killing Marks Record Month*

The body of Simie Farnelli, leader of the Chelsea and Twenty-third Street gang, was found yesterday by an unnamed person in a wooded lot on the north shore of Long Island, some three miles from Mayfair. The Chelsea and Twenty-third Street gang is known to have been at war with the Red Wooster mob which controls the Madison Square district. As usual, the police found no trace of those responsible for the killing and stated that —

Which was where Perkins ceased reading and began to dress. Patrolman Barnard Murphy did not see the approach of the little man. He was too interested in a conversation he was carrying on with a blonde head that leaned from a window on the parlor floor.

Perkins ran around the corner, perceived the officer, and slowed his steps. He touched Murphy's sleeve.

"Good morning."

"Morning, Mr. Perkins."

"I think that congratulations are in order for the police department."

"What?"

"Did you see the papers?"

"Sure I saw 'em."

"Did you know that Simie Farnelli had been killed?"

"Sure."

"Well?"

"What of it?" Murphy asked.

"If you examine the body, I believe you will find that the murder was done with a small, round object. An ice pick, for example."

Murphy frowned and then he smiled. In his smile was something almost paternal. "Oho! I see! You put two and two together, Mr. Perkins." His head shook sadly. "I wish things were as simple as that. If they were, we'd have a cinch. No. I've given up the ice pick. It's just dumb to let a thing like that get hold of you. You'd never find out how that blood got there in a hundred years. Last night I had a hunch about it. Today — I'm all off the hunch."

"But —"

"I guess you didn't see the whole story. They found Simie dead, all

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right. Shot. With a .45. Somebody made him face a tree and drilled a hole right through him. They even found the slug buried in the tree. Simie did belong in these parts, Mr. Perkins, but I guess a suspicious-looking ice pick hasn't any more to do with him than the moon."

"Turned detective, Barney?"

The sarcasm was evident. Both men looked up at the girl. Murphy reddened. "This is Mr. Perkins, Janet. Nice guy. Friend of mine. We — we —"

Perkins bowed. Then he explained. "We were engaged in a little research together."

Janet laughed. Her laughter made Perkins uncomfortable and it made Murphy angry. Since he could not rebuke the lady, he said to Perkins, "Just forget that applesauce about the pick."

Perkins went away.

That night he read further accounts of the Long Island assassination, and it happened as Murphy had said. Perkins sighed and determined to put the ice pick from his mind. Every detective, even Holmes, had his list of closed and unsolved cases. He went on with his patient collecting of accounts of gem thefts. It was his theory that if he could demonstrate to the police that the similarity of numerous robberies showed the existence of an organization, he might thereby initiate himself into the corps of real detectives.

On the next day he met Murphy in a cafeteria. He gave the officer the close scrutiny he had trained himself to focus on every person and he voiced his deduction.

"Evening, Mr. Murphy. You look downcast. Did that blonde girl say 'no'?"

Murphy answered apathetically. "Well — you're partly right. She's off me because I'm dumb. I got the devil from the Captain this morning."

"Too bad."

"Yeah. Funny thing. It was about that Simie Farnelli killing." Murphy was sad and sad men air their grievances with little prompting. "This would interest you — what with all your dope on crime. Farnelli was bumped in Long Island. And the only guys that had any reason to do it are the Wooster mob. They figured out that he was shot about five in the afternoon. No doubt about who did it — the Red Woosters. But when we checked them up, where do you think Wooster and his buddies were at five o'clock?"

"Where?"

Murphy emphasized his point with a forefinger. "Right on my beat. In Yerkin's Tailor Shop. Gettin' new suits. Can you feature that? And me — I never saw 'em. What a bawling out I got! There they were and somebody taking Simie for a ride out on Long Island." Murphy sighed. "First it was the Captain and then Janet and when they got through I'd run out of answers."

"I don't see," Perkins said slowly, "what you could have done about it."

"No? Nothing, most likely. But it's

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supposed to be my duty to know when one gang goes shopping in another gang's territory. That's nerve. They bump off a Chelsea big shot and they establish their alibi in Chelsea territory. They were at Yerkin's mostly all day yesterday. To hell with 'em. A lousy bunch of thugs, that's what they are. Shoot in the back. Six men to one. Carry machine guns in fiddle cases. That's a devil of a note."

"Yerkin's is right across from my house," Perkins said.

"Yeah. You didn't see 'em, did you?"

"Me? Oh, no. At five o'clock on that afternoon I was reading a treatise on blood coagulation."

"Oh. Well, seems like the Red Woosters have had a run on Yerkin's. Been going there regular for their clothes for six weeks. Custom-made silk shirts and all. Swell life!"

Perkins nodded. "The so-called gang criminal element of American society is a relatively new aspect of underworld phenomena. A development from the early gangs — the Plug Uglies and so on. A form of pernicious parasitism —"

"Yeah," Murphy said. "But that don't do me any good. The Captain tells me I'm born to be a flatfoot and nothing else. Janet says she wouldn't hire me for the night watchman of a car barn. Simie Farnelli's dead. The newspapers are hollering their heads off. We know the Woosters did it but we don't know how and we never will. Two Woosters have been questioned and three are out on bail, but is there any Wooster in the big house? There is not!"

Perkins had been thoughtful. Now he spoke with new hope.

"When are you off duty, Mr. Murphy?"

"All morning tomorrow."

"Would you care to go out to Long Island with me?"

"Long Island? What for?"

"We might look over the spot where Simie was killed. Sometimes little things escape the notice of the police — small items that mean worlds to the —" he cleared his throat — "trained investigator."

Murphy grinned — possibly for the first time that day. "Sure. I'll go with you, Mr. Perkins. I'd like to see one of them trained investigators at work."

Murphy was in civilian clothes. He pushed his derby back on his head, watched the interurban car disappear in the distance, and turned to Perkins.

"There's the spot, right across the road."

"Mmmmmm."

"I reckon it's that big tree there."

The two men crossed the paved street and examined the tree. Breast high on the trunk was a freshly opened scar.

"That," Murphy said, "is where they dug out the bullet. It went right through Simie — back to front — and plopped in this tree." He stared at the countryside. Half a dozen houses were visible when he walked a few steps forward and looked over a slight rise of ground. "Somebody in

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one of those houses heard the shot. Thought it was a backfire. Came through here on a path a couple of hours later and found him."

"I see."

Perkins was ill at ease. It is one thing to study to be a detective, to read mystery stories, to keep files on crime. It is another to stand in a weedy, wooded lot where there is rubbish and ample indication of human trespass, where a tree trunk is split, but where everything looks normal and commonplace — and to try to deduce from those surroundings the facts of a murder which occurred in them.

Perkins shut his jaw. He told himself that he must carry on. Here was gleaming opportunity. Here was the point at which he could set up a monument to the keen intelligence of Willis Perkins, former bank employee and now private investigator.

He took his reading glass from his pocket. On his hands and knees he circled round and round the big tree. Murphy watched him until he was tired; then he sat down on a stone and lit a cigarette. At last Perkins rose and dusted himself.

He said, "Hmmmmmm."

"Find anything?"

"I'm not sure," Perkins answered.

Into his pocket he had put a leaf, a twig, a match-stick, and a piece of string. He had done it solely to make an impression on Murphy. He knew that the discoveries were without value and would yield no interpretation. But he did not suspect that Murphy also knew — not until they had returned from their pilgrimage. The policeman accompanied him to his rooms and remained to talk. He looked at Perkins for some time and with kindly eyes. At last he spoke.

"Mr. Perkins, you're a nice little guy. I appreciate your going out there today. I know you did it for me. But I'd like to give you a little advice. I've been on the Force for two years. And crime — no crime — is solved by this kind of stuff. By string and dead matches. That's all just applesauce. These books —" he waved at Perkins' library — "fun to read, but hooie. Pure hooie. Now, if you can afford it — and I guess you've saved enough — why it's all right to read 'em. But they don't mean anything. If I was you, I'd go back to the bank."

Murphy was not watching the face of the little man, or he would not have continued. "You take these gang killings. That's not the sort of thing for a man like you to get mixed up in. They're toughs — those guys. They just get some bird, shoot a hole in him, beat it, establish an alibi — and there you are. It isn't like the murders in the books. It's just a business — see?"

He saw Perkins' face then — but it was too late. There was nothing for him to do. He blushed, held out his hand, and snatched it back when he realized Perkins' eyes were too moist to see it, and walked to the door.

"Anyway — thanks. And I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

It was two o'clock at night. The

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city slept and the trucks that prowl in the dark hours banged through the streets. Perkins paced the floor of his apartment. His features were drawn and his fists were clenched.

"Toughs!" he whispered to himself. "You're a nice guy but you ought not to get mixed up with such things. These books. Hooie! Brains! Where are my brains? That's what the study of crime needs. Brains. Reason. Imagination. I've got to show him." The words were uttered with all the fervor of prayer. "I've got to show him. Nice little guy!"

At that point, as if in answer, Perkins was stopped short by a thought. It was so fleeting that he could not hold it in his mind at first — but it came back. It stayed and it grew. He realized the seriousness and the difficulty of the problem which accompanied his inspiration, but so sure was he of himself that he paused for a moment before his full-length mirror and looked at his reflection. His head was up. His shoulders were back. His eyes flashed. He made a deprecatory gesture with his hand and his lips framed words which might have been, "Elementary, my dear Murphy. Elementary."

Murphy walked more slowly. He refused an apple offered to him. He whistled timidly at Number 186, but Janet did not appear. A small man rounded a corner from the direction of the subway. He caught sight of Murphy and hurried toward him. When he drew near, however, his pace became stately and grave. He gained the side of the policeman.

"Ah! Murphy! Good morning."

"Oh — howdy — Mr. Perkins. Say. I'm sorry about what I said last night. No offense meant."

"Pshaw! It's all right. Of course — you're just beginning on the Force — and I've studied for twenty-six years. I could scarcely expect that you would understand my methods at once."

"Oh," Murphy said. He seemed disinclined to converse further. But Perkins strolled along at his side.

"By the way," he said presently. "I've just been up to have a look at Simie Farnelli's body."

"What!"

"Yes, indeed. Idea of mine. In fact, a rather obvious idea. It was being prepared for the funeral today. This noon. I made a suggestion or two — through the proper channels, of course. As a result, there was a hasty autopsy. The discoveries will be in the papers in a couple of hours."

Murphy was standing stock still. "What discoveries?"

"Oh — the ones I expected."

"Say, are you kidding me?"

"No. No. Not a bit."

"Well, what are you getting at?"

"Nothing, Mr. Murphy. I've been putting two and two together — as you suggested at an earlier date."

Murphy was impatient. "Listen, Mr. Perkins —"

"Didn't you tell me that the Wooster gang murdered Farnelli?"

"Sure. That is, we all think so."

"Exactly. And didn't you say that

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the Wooster gang was at Yerkin's when the murder was supposed to have been done?"

"Sure."

"And did you ever notice that Yerkin's is next door to Tom's ice place?"

Murphy scowled, and then there came into his face a vagueness and an uncertainty. "Mr. Perkins, will you tell me —"

"I am," Perkins answered. "I am. That was the first point that attracted my attention. The nearness of Yerkin's to Tom's. The second was the uncertainty about the time of the killing of Simie. It was alleged to have been five o'clock. But the body wasn't discovered until two hours after the shot was heard. So that the shot might have been fired and the body deposited later. That is to say — it might have been *a dead man* that they stood against a tree and shot at!"

There were beads of perspiration on Murphy's brow. They came out partly from impatience, partly from an undeveloped suspicion of the truth, and partly from the immense effort he was making to follow the tantalizing hints of the smaller man.

"Go on —" he begged.

"I am. As I said. It might have been a dead man. That is the second point. Now why, I said to myself, would anybody want to shoot a dead man? For practice?"

Murphy breathed heavily. "Don't be funny," he said. "This ain't no time for it."

"Quite right. Let us see. I said, people might shoot a dead man for one reason, at least. And that would be — *to eliminate the evidence of some other form of murder!* If you chopped off a man's head, for example, it would be hard to prove that he had been strangled first. So I suggested the autopsy and they found that there were two holes in Simie's heart. One had been made by a .45 — and the other —"

"Yes?"

"The other? Well, Murphy, I found the body that belongs to your ice pick."

There was a long pause. The two men stood on the sidewalk, face to face, Murphy's eyes bulging. "Go on," he said softly, after a while.

"That's all there is to it."

"I don't get the picture, Perkins old kid."

"Mercy!" Perkins answered. "Then listen carefully. This is all pure deduction. It comes out of books. Hooie, you'd call it. All right to read for fun, but —"

"Cut it out."

"Anyway, listen. Red Wooster is fighting the Chelsea gang. He would like to get Simie Farnelli. He finds out all he can about Simie, especially where he goes regularly and when. Simie passes Tom's nearly every day on his way to his headquarters. The Woosters don't like to shoot in Chelsea because they might not get away with it. Next to Tom's is Yerkin's. So they start patronizing Yerkin. One day when everything is all set, Simie comes along. The Wooster car

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is parked in front of Tom's. Simie possibly stops to look at it. Perhaps they just come out to talk to Simie. They stand around and bicker. Simie's in his own territory and he feels safe enough.

"At Simie's back and within arm's reach is Tom's order table with the ice picks on it. Someone kills Simie with the ice pick. He is gently lifted into the car. It drives away. Now, the rest is merely my guess. Simie's body is held against the tree and a forty-five is used to put a bullet in him just where the ice pick stab was made."

Murphy blotted his brow. "Why all that rigmarole?"

Perkins smiled blandly. "Don't you see? Between three and five the Wooster mob was over at Yerkin's in Chelsea, next door to the scene of the actual murder, getting fitted for a lot of fancy clothing, but the murder was apparently done at that time thirty miles away!"

"But —"

Perkins lifted his hand. "The Woosters wouldn't have invented a scheme so elaborate for anyone but Simie Farnelli. You see, Red Wooster and his lieutenants were beyond blame, because the Chelsea gang knew that they were in Chelsea all afternoon. The Woosters weren't afraid of the police as much as they were of the Chelsea gang. But I think they may worry a little when they read the afternoon papers and see that the police have found two wounds in Simie's heart — one made by an ice pick and one by a .45."

At last Murphy commenced to think. "That's coming out in the papers?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And the funeral's set for this noon?"

"This very moment."

"And if the Chelsea gang knows that Simie was bumped before that Long Island business, they'll get suspicious."

"Quite so."

"And the Woosters will beat it out of town!"

"I should imagine," Perkins said, "that they would leave about five minutes after the first newspapers carrying the story of the two wounds appear."

"Then I gotta get busy."

"It was on the tip of my tongue to make the suggestion."

Murphy's daze lasted no longer. He stared at the transfigured face of the little man. Then, in an instant, he was on his way to a call box. In another instant he was connected with headquarters. Five minutes later he and Perkins had commandeered a taxicab and were rushing toward the Madison Square hangout where the Red Woosters held court.

What happened immediately afterward filled the newspapers for days. On a tip from Patrolman Barnard Murphy, a large detachment of police surrounded and entered the hangout. Wooster and a dozen of his gang were there. They did not surrender easily. In fact, the siege required to evacuate them lasted for nearly an hour. Two of them were wounded and at least

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one policeman had powder marks on his face after the fracas. It was while the patrols were leaving Madison Square that Murphy appeared before Perkins, who had watched the drama from a distance.

"Mr. Perkins! I've been looking all over for you!"

"Did you get them?"

"We got them, but listen —" Murphy gulped — "I was so excited that I forgot to ask you how we're going to prove all this. We can't get no confessions out of them. Don't you see? We got this all rigged — and maybe we're right about it — but we can't *stick* it on them."

"No?"

"Why —" Murphy said, and his voice was hoarse — "why — I even gave that ice pick back to Tom!"

There were shouts down the street. A police gong rang and a huge crowd made way. Perkins lifted his voice a little.

"You know, Murphy, if you hadn't picked up that ice pick, I never would have thought about the suspiciousness of Woosters being at Yerkin's."

The Patrolman groaned. "Wait till the Captain hears this one. I set off a raid — on suspicion. He'll never believe your yarn and now there's no chance of proving it."

Perkins nodded. "When you asked me to examine the blood on the ice pick, I also looked for fingerprints."

Murphy could only gasp. He had never thought of fingerprints.

"There were yours," Perkins continued, "and some others. I am familiar with the Bertillion fingerprint system. I photographed those fingerprints. This morning before I saw you I had a search made for them. It was not a very difficult problem, because I merely suggested that my photographs be compared with the police prints of Red Wooster." The little man paused. "They were identical. And that, Murphy, although it was something I learned in books, will certainly stick the murder on the man who did it."

The Patrolman did not reply for some time. And then he took Perkins' arm. "Come on," he said. "I want to introduce you to the Chief."

"No — thanks." The eyes of the little man were far away. He was remembering some phrase, some fragment of the code of the detective, the immortal amateur in whose likeness he was moulding himself. "No, Murphy, the credit's all yours. You found the ice pick. Everything hinged on that. Here are the photographs and," from another pocket he withdrew a package, "here's the ice pick. I got it back from Tom. From here on, I think the case is safe with the authorities. Goodday, Murphy."

Sergeant Barnard Murphy walked through Chelsea. It was evening. A newspaper was offered to him by an eager boy — a paper which contained his photograph. The Italian at the fruit stand came out to shower him with compliments. At Number 186 Janet appeared on the street coincidentally with Sergeant Murphy's

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passing. She asked if she could walk with him. He took her arm. They strolled into the gathering gloom. By and by a small, wispy man approached them. The Sergeant stopped, but the little man passed with only a smile and a nod.

"Who's that, darling?" Janet asked. "I've seen you with him before."

Murphy shook his head in silent wonderment. "That little guy is a retired bank clerk. He's got what you call a hobby."

"He doesn't look like much."

"No," Murphy replied. "No. But in my opinion, that little guy is the greatest detective in New York. Yeah — in the whole United States."

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## Further Comments on *Mr. Montalba, Obsequist*

*After reading an advance proof of your Editor's introduction (page 98), the author, Mr. H. F. Heard, denies that "Mr. Montalba, Obsequist" is fantasy. Mr. Heard's arguments are both interesting and convincing. We are passing them on to you because, if you'll pardon the pun, we think the author should be heard. He writes: "I maintain the Montalba plot is not fantasy for (a) 'Aeternitas' was an actual German invention and I have actually owned a specimen bought in Berlin; and (b) the trick of getting into catalepsy can actually be learned, and the person can stay without breathing for long periods; again, I actually knew a man who could do it as a demonstration. Why then say the story is fantasy?" Why then, indeed?*

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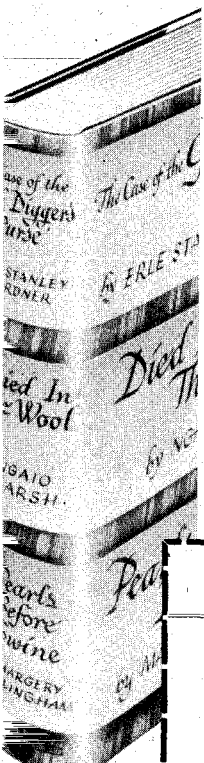


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